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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2002

# CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

**Tests**

WASHING MACHINES
CORDLESS PHONES
VCRs
SHOWER CLEANERS

# MANAGED FUNDS

## Take the puzzle out of investing

**COTS**
Still not safe

**FOOD IRRADIATION**
For or against?

**AD MAGIC**
Why the food never looks like the photo

*Charles Britton*
*Senior Policy Officer, ACA*

# Your privacy, your choice?

People value their privacy. Research by the Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner in July 2001 showed that for the majority of people, respect for personal information ranked equal to quality of product. The same research showed that business put the protection of personal information well down the list as a factor in the mind of their customers. So there's a gap in expectations between consumers and business on privacy.

The new private-sector Privacy Act is an opportunity for good businesses to close that gap, and many will. However, the system that's been put in place means bad players will have plenty of places to hide. Consumers can expect a mixed experience of privacy protection as the Act comes into force.

Companies gather, process, use and store consumers' personal information, and share it with other organisations, in the course of doing business. The Privacy Act gives you some control over how this is done. A series of 10 National Privacy Principles sets out what you must be told and when your permission must be sought to use or share the information.

Businesses should only gather strictly necessary information about you. They're required to give you access to it and correct it if it's wrong — though they can charge a fee for doing so. In certain situations, your consent is explicitly required, such as in relation to the handling of sensitive data, which includes health information.

Many people have a problem with direct marketing, especially unsolicited email. Unfortunately the Privacy Act doesn't provide as much protection as you might hope. In certain circumstances, 'implied consent' is considered acceptable — the fact that you've never said 'no' can be read as a 'yes'. If your details were originally collected for the purpose of direct marketing or if the direct marketing is 'related' to the company's business relationship with you, it doesn't have to ask your permission or even give you the option of 'opting out' (saying no to any further direct marketing contact from them). If none of these applies, the direct marketer is only required to think about getting your consent if it's practical to do so. And if it's not practical, they can go right ahead and market to you, so long as they give you an opportunity to opt out.

There's plenty of opportunity for business to get it wrong in this maze of possibilities, so the best approach would be for them always to ask your permission before using your personal information, particularly for marketing. Unfortunately, in the real world this may not always happen.

The extension of the Privacy Act to private-sector business came into effect on December 21 last year. For the first time, Australian consumers now have broad privacy rights and someone to complain to: the Federal Privacy Commissioner. If your personal information is misused, and you can't resolve the issue with the company concerned, you can: write to the Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner, GPO Box 5218, Sydney 1042; phone the hotline, 1300 363 922, for the cost of a local call; or email the Privacy Commissioner's secure encrypted service: see www.privacy.gov.au/rights/index.html for details.

*Charles Britton, Senior Policy Officer*


# CHOICE

is published by the Australian Consumers' Association


## YOUR LETTERS

We welcome the letters you send us — please always include a daytime telephone number so we can contact you quickly if we want to follow up your letter. We're sorry we can't answer every letter we receive, but we do use them in our research. Thanks for taking the time to keep in touch.

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**We are completely independent.** Our income is derived solely from the sale of CHOICE and our other publications and products. All the products we subject to full testing and comparison are purchased by us in the marketplace; sometimes to get the latest model we may buy directly from a manufacturer where we can select a random sample ourselves. We never accept gifts from manufacturers or retailers; we sometimes borrow samples, especially of new products, for quick reviews or pre-evaluation before we can buy in the marketplace. We are not beholden to any commercial, government or union interests, and we don't accept advertising, paid or unpaid.

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**We represent and act in consumers' interests.** We lobby and campaign on behalf of consumers to promote their rights, to influence government policy, and to ensure consumer issues have a high profile in the public arena.

**Membership.** Subscribers can become voting members of the Consumers' Association on application. Voting membership costs $93.50 for a year, which covers your subscription to CHOICE with free access to CHOICE Online and a further subscription to our policy and campaigning magazine, *Consuming Interest.*

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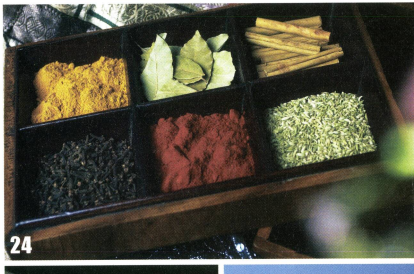
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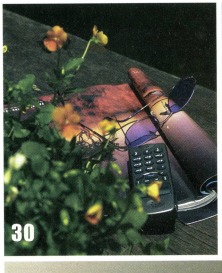
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UPDATE

## CHOICE SHOPPER

Since Choice Shopper was launched at the beginning of October, we've had a strong response from subscribers. Choice Shopper is our new free service to shop for you and save you money.

Most people who tried the service were interested in electrical appliances, and there were also a few car sales. Early figures indicate subscribers saved on average a little over 9% on the target prices they phoned in.

Other feedback is also positive: subscribers found the service pleasant and easy to use which, along with the savings, made them very likely to use Choice Shopper again.

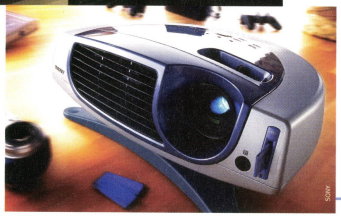
If you haven't tried it yet, think about it when you want to make a purchase as an easy and convenient way to shop — and you'll almost certainly save money. Just decide the exact model you want and a price you're happy to pay for it (maybe based on one you've seen in a shop near you), then call 1300 360 655 and we'll do the rest.

You need your member number, which appears on each CHOICE mailing label, to access the service. If you can't find it or have any other questions about Choice Shopper, call our Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399, 9 am to 5 pm EST, Monday to Friday. You can also find information about the service on page 4 of CHOICE, October 2001; or if you have Internet access, go to www.choice.com.au, type 'Choice Shopper' in the search box, then click on 'let us shop for you'.

# Big-screen home theatre

If a home theatre with pictures projected on a wall or screen sounds appealing, a product like the **SONY Cineza VPL-HS1** home cinema projector could be what you're looking for. At just under $6000 it's not cheap, but there aren't many similar products under around $8000.

Hooked up to a TV, computer, camcorder, DVD or video player, the **Cineza** can project an image measuring up to two metres corner-to-corner from around four metres away. It's bright enough in a darkened room, but incidental side lighting from a doorway or window can be a problem. However, we were quite impressed with the image quality from a computer in a room with low-powered overhead lighting.




The **Cineza** is small (34 cm wide x 15.5 cm high x 30 cm deep) and light (3.9 kg) with reasonably well-designed external tilt and up/down controls, so it doesn't have to sit on a completely flat surface. It has a useful focus and zoom function, which helps compensate for different-sized screens. There's a fan to keep the lamp cool, but it's pretty quiet.

Another useful feature called 'keystoning' lets you place the projector off-centre relative to the screen. It adjusts the shape of the image to compensate for the angle of the screen, and works quite well with reasonably fine adjustments.

The menus and controls are simple to understand and use. Our sample came without a manual in English, but by the time one arrived from Sony we'd managed to work out how to set the **Cineza** up and use it. The remote control is functional and has a backlight, but some of the labels on the buttons are a bit small.

The body has connections for composite and S-video, as well as its own 32-pin multi-connector. It comes with a five metre cable for composite video, and the power cable is about the same length. You can buy other cables suitable for component video or a computer/gaming device, but they'll set you back around $148 each. There's also a slot for Sony's Message Stick, so you can display digital still pictures.

Apart from the price, its main failings include a slightly visible shadow of the unused part of the liquid crystal display when the picture is in 16:9 aspect ratio, and a predicted lamp life of approximately 2000 hours, costing around $495 to replace. So if you only used the **Cineza** to watch movies (averaging two hours each), it'd add about $0.50 per movie, but it could be expensive if you play computer games a lot or use it for watching TV.

**Our verdict:** A practical solution for the small home theatre — if you can afford it.

RHONDA THWAITE

# Vegies the best protection against bowel cancer

The link between fibre and bowel cancer was made over 40 years ago, when it was discovered that in parts of Africa where they have a high-fibre diet, bowel cancer is rare.

For some aspects of good health, it's likely all fibre is beneficial, leading nutritionists to recommend people eat more fruit, vegetables, cereals and some cereal products like pasta.

But fibre comes in many forms, and it seems some are better than others when it comes to preventing bowel cancer, according to December's *CHOICE Health Reader*.

Scientists in Switzerland compared the types of fibre eaten by people with and without bowel cancer, and calculated the odds of getting cancer based on eating different kinds of fibre-rich food.

Vegetables were the most protective, leading to a 40% reduction in risk; a high grain intake reduced the risk by 26% and fruit by 22%. So there's yet another reason to eat plenty of vegies — particularly if you're at a high risk of bowel cancer.

Also in this issue of *Health Reader*:

- Progesterone, progestogens (synthetic versions of the hormone) and so-called 'natural progesterone' are unlikely to help ease PMS symptoms.
- The latest 'disability-adjusted life expectancy scales' (DALES) put Australians second-highest in the world: we can expect a healthy life free from disability or 'confinement' for 73.2 years, on average. Japan tops the list with 74.5.

To subscribe to *Health Reader*, phone our Consumer Services on 1800 069 552.

## CAN YOU HELP?

**Branch closures and community banks**

Has your local bank branch closed? Have you had any experience with a community bank?

If so, CHOICE would like to hear from you. Please tell us:

- How did you cope with your bank branch closing? Did it make a difference to your shopping or banking habits?
- Has your community launched a community bank? If you were involved, how did you do this and how difficult was it to make it work?
- If you've had any experience using a community bank, how would you compare it to banking with an ordinary bank, credit union or building society?

Please reply by mail to **Community banks**, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or by email to communitybanks@choice.com.au, by February 15.

Thank you for your help.

UPDATE

## DIGITAL CAMCORDERS

**CHOICE, November 2001**

On page 18 we said you can't connect an external microphone to either of the **JVC** models tested. Hagemeyer, the Australian distributor for **JVC** camcorders, has informed us since publication that you can buy a specific **JVC** external microphone for the **JVC GR-DVP3**, which is connected via the accessory shoe and may improve the camcorder's sound quality.

## WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

### PORRIDGE FOR PERFORMANCE

Our Austrian consumer counterpart reported recently on Sex Activa — a product derived from *Avena sativa* (rolled oats) that's claimed to improve male performance.

*Konsument* writes that oats have long been known for their digestive qualities, but there's little evidence to support the new claim except for the power of placebos.

If you think it's worth giving the idea a go, it'd be much cheaper to shell out for rolled oats for porridge than around $170 for 120 pills — and since they're distributed from a post office box in Liechtenstein, you've little recourse in the case of deflated hopes.

### SHORT BUT NOT SWEET

From Ireland's *Consumer Choice* come a few trendy terms used to describe 'new-generation consumers' — spawned by the rapidly changing world of IT.

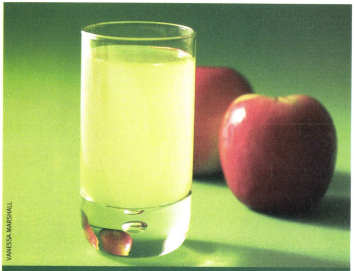
Spicing up consumer representation these days are 'blandies', who talk loudly of work, money and cars, 'bobos' — bourgeois bohemians who practise yoga and meditate before powering up their laptop, and 'yetis' — young entrepreneurial technocrats.

Use them to impress (or describe) your friends...

### DROWN THEM DRUNK

From German *Test* magazine comes a modification of an old idea for tackling snails: collect them by hand and then drown them in beer. In response to a *Test* article that mentioned 'beer traps' for snails, a reader wrote to suggest the above alternative, as traps can also drown 'good' insects. Other methods, such as sprinkling salt on snails, are slow and painful, and cutting them up with secateurs or boiling them is pretty barbaric.

Another tip is to start the war early in the season: collect young snails to prevent them from breeding.



VANESSA MARSHALL

## TOXIN IN SOME APPLE JUICE

Patulin is a toxin produced in some fruit by various moulds. It can end up in juice when, for example, mouldy or rotten apples are used; apparently good-quality apples can also be affected near the core.

Eleven years ago the NSW health department surveyed apple juice, pear juice and apple products (like purée and diced fruit) for the presence of patulin. The results of the survey were pretty alarming: it was detected at levels above the limit set by both some European countries and the US (50 µg/kg) in 73 out of 258 juice samples. We have no limit in Australia.

Eleven years on we decided to spot-check major apple juice brands to see if manufacturers have lifted their game. We bought and tested 10 brands widely available in Sydney, both fresh and shelf-stable.

While it's only a small survey, results show the problem still exists to some extent. The worst offender was **THE ORIGINAL JUICE COMPANY Black Label Apple Juice** (fresh) with 129 µg/kg of patulin. **FARMLAND Apple Juice** (fresh), **AUSTRALIAN FRESH Fresh Apple Juice** and **THE 100% AUSTRALIAN DAILY JUICE COMPANY Apple Juice** (fresh) all contained small amounts of patulin as well. The following brands were clear:

- **P & N JUICE Apple Juice** (shelf-stable).
- **BERRI Apple Juice** (shelf-stable).
- **COLES Apple Juice** (shelf-stable).
- **HOME BRAND Apple Juice** (shelf-stable).
- **MR JUICY Apple Juice** (fresh).
- **JUST JUICE Apple Juice** (shelf-stable).

While patulin isn't particularly potent (unlike the carcinogenic aflatoxin, often associated with peanuts), it's toxic enough to warrant having a limit placed on it and the US FDA thinks humans may be at risk of harm at some level of exposure to patulin. It's been shown to have toxic effects in animals.

CHOICE will be asking our food regulator (ANZFA) to include a limit for patulin in the Food Standards Code. It's important that manufacturers can be penalised for not doing the right thing. They need to maintain a strict quality control program and ensure their suppliers provide them with only sound fruit.

## SOMETHING ABOUT PHILIP?

The following reports of slips-of-the-tongue by company representatives come from our sister magazine in the US, *Consumer Reports*.

- Philip Morris officials in the Czech Republic distributed an economic analysis concluding that, "...the early mortality of smokers" reduced "healthcare costs ... pensions and housing costs" — in other words, you smoke, you die, you save the government money.

As one Czech anti-smoking advocate put it, "Just from the economic point of view, the best recommendation for governments would be to kill all people at the day of their retirement."

The company has since apologised, saying the study "exhibited terrible judgment as well as a complete and unacceptable disregard of basic human values".

- Philips Lighting also slipped up, though not as badly, on the packaging of its 85 W light bulb, which claims that the bulb "replaces a 100-watt indoor flood".

When asked about the qualifying note: "Provides 23% less light output than the 100 W bulb it replaces", a company representative suggested it could be used to replace a 100-watt bulb, but said, "It doesn't really replace it 100%." Isn't "replace" kind of misleading, then? "It's not maybe a good word," she said. Obviously not.

CORRECTIONS

## GENERIC DRUGS + CHOICE CUT

**CHOICE, November 2001**

On page 5 we said that if you take vitamin K you should stop seven days prior to any surgery. Instead you should tell all doctors you consult that you're taking vitamin K, as it can significantly affect the dose of certain drugs you may be given, such as warfarin. Your doctor can then advise you regarding your vitamin K intake.

Warfarin and vitamin K both act on the body's blood-clotting function. To clarify what we wrote on pages 5 and 30, warfarin reduces clotting, while vitamin K increases it.

Also on page 5 we said you should avoid taking phytoestrogens and soy proteins during pregnancy. This warning is correct for phytoestrogens but not for soy proteins, which are OK during pregnancy if eaten in normal amounts.

## HEAD LICE TREATMENTS

**CHOICE, August 2001**

On page 30 we said a recent trial in Queensland had shown that **LICEBLASTER**, used with a louse comb, was more effective than maldison-based **KP24** foam. We've since learnt that this trial was flawed and that no conclusions can be drawn from it about the relative performance of the products.

# yourletters

## GM worries

I read with concern a newspaper report that supermarkets and food producers have backed the Prime Minister's so-called compromise on labelling foods containing genetically modified ingredients.

Mr Howard wants labels that tell us if food contains 1% or more genetically modified material. Food containing less than that, by implication, is considered GM-free. If there are small quantities, such as 1% of food additives, that aren't GM-free, why imply that the product *is* GM-free?

The safety of GM products is not tested adequately or independently. The medical ramifications of wrongly labelled food are imponderable. The introduction of genetically engineered material into our food supply is abhorrent to many people. Eating traces of genetic material from pork, for instance, is unthinkable for certain religious groups. Traces of any genes causing allergy could be fatal to some individuals.

I fully agree with the Australian Consumers' Association that such mislabelling is lying to the public.

Let's leave our labels honest!

**Renate Wood**
**Lindfield, NSW**

*We received Renate's letter back in 2000, and decided to print it now even though the 1% threshold she mentions has since been introduced, because now the food industry has pushed state and federal ministers into extending requirements for GM labelling compliance beyond the original cut-off date of December 7, 2001.*

*Despite the industry having had a year to organise labelling compliance, our food regulator has now allowed foods with a use-by date after December 7, 2001, to remain on our shelves without any GM labelling until expiry or December 20, 2002, whichever comes first.*

*As well, other GM food doesn't have to be labelled if:*

- *Up to 1% of the final product has been accidentally contaminated.*
- *It's highly refined, so there's no modified DNA or protein in the final product. For example, oil made from modified corn won't have to be labelled. Modified processing aids and additives are used, but there's no modified DNA or protein left in the final food.*
- *Modified flavours are used and they make up less than 0.1% of the final food.*
- *It's prepared at the point of sale (so takeaway and restaurant food won't have to be labelled).*

*The food industry currently has the upper hand. We, however, think consumers need tougher regulation and enforcement to ensure their health, safety and right to useful information about food products.*

## THUMBS UP

- From Mrs Mary Mittiga, in St Mary's, NSW, a big thumbs-up to **Breville,** which posted a part to her at no charge, although her appliance was over 20 years old. Another bouquet to the company comes from Chris Greenough, via Internet, who received a replacement handle for a broken sandwich maker at no charge.

And WS Millar, from Tasmania, gives similar thanks to **Mistral,** which promptly sent him a replacement skillet at no charge after the handle fell off — although it was originally a freebie.

- Peter Bubendorfer, via Internet, gives a thumbs-up to **Suncorp Metway**, which sent a refund and letter of apology after billing him for a cancelled insurance policy — even though he'd lost the documentation and didn't ask for his money back.

## Cooling tips

Thank you for your list of options for cooling a home (October 2001, *A really cool home*). Another method I remember from the US is the use of 'attic fans', which should work well in most parts of Australia. As the process doesn't require compressors or pumps it's quite cheap.

A high-volume fan with a diameter of about 1.5 m is installed in the ceiling in the central hallway of a house. At night, when the outside air is cooler, the fan is turned on to suck warm air from inside the house into the ceiling cavity, then push it outside via one or more vents in the attic space. Windows are strategically opened in the house to pull cool air from, say, under a nearby tree or across an east-facing lawn, where a lawn sprinkler can be used to further cool the air by evaporation.

The attic fan and ceiling vents are covered with lightly spring-loaded louvres that open with the air pressure of the operating fan. Windows can be selectively opened throughout the house to cool each room as needed. A pleasant breeze is generated through the house; the air inside's cooled quite effectively; the hot attic air's evacuated in no time and the lawn is watered after an hour or two!

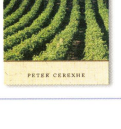
**Tom Gouldie**
**Wistow, SA**

*Tom describes a combination of useful measures for cooling your home, including cross-ventilation and evaporative cooling by turning on the sprinkler. If any of it's feasible in your situation, it may well be a better (and cheaper) way of cooling your home than installing an air conditioner.*

*Thanks for the tips.*

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Renate Wood of Lindfield, NSW , receives *The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2002*, or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 35 to 37.




We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us. And keep your letters and emails coming about *positive* outcomes following your complaint to a retailer, manufacturer or tradesperson. Address your letters to 'Thumbs up' at the address on page 2.

# Food, fabulous food

If you've ever flicked through the pages of a glossy food magazine or drooled over the gastro-porn in the latest cookbook, you've seen what a food stylist can do. But how do they get that fabulous, luscious look that says "Eat me"?

## IN A NUTSHELL

**Seeing's definitely not believing:** *here's why food never looks like the photo on the package when you cook and serve it.*

To the uninitiated, the lengths to which food stylists go to make food look perfect may be surprising. As one person commented when we started on this story, surely if you want a photo of a chook, you just photograph a chook.

The problem with food photography is that food tends to dry out, shrink, discolour and sag — food styling is about counteracting these forces. As the photos on these pages show, there's a definite art to getting a picture of food that looks good enough to eat, rather than looking destined for the bin. Here's what goes on to get that one apparently simple pic.

## REAL OR FAKE?

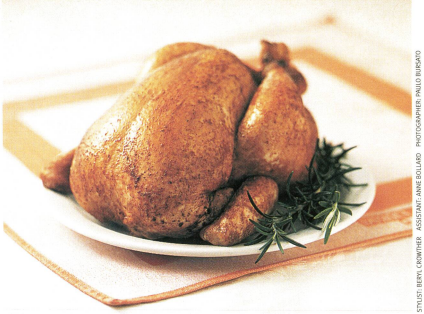
We talked to food stylists and found two schools of thought. Some try to use real food no matter what. Others use whatever techniques get the shot to look right — fake or not. And most are somewhere in between.

In Australia the real-food camp seems to hold sway, with most photos aiming for a natural look using the real thing (albeit with a make-up job). On the other hand, in the US, while they're moving towards a more casual approach to food shots, the art of faking the parts of a shot that don't fall foul of consumer protection laws seems to have been perfected.

Of course, there are different types of food photography. A shot for packaging or an ad has to show the real food being advertised, though that doesn't mean it can't be tweaked, titivated and made-up. And an advertising picture is aiming for perfection. A photo for a glossy recipe mag is more likely to want a casual 'real' look than perfection. As one stylist put it, "Editorial is about drawing people into the experience of the food, while advertising is about capturing the perfect vision of the food."

Much food styling could be summarised as lateral thinking and patience, patience, patience — just keep setting up the food over and over or keep it constantly refreshed until the photographer gets the perfect shot. In fact, the photography itself is an art — it's not unusual to spend most of a day getting the lighting perfect for a single shot.

Of course, these days fixing a shot which isn't *quite* right can be as simple as a photo touch-up by computer — for example, one picture has the perfect cheesecake, while another has the perfect dollop of cream. Combine the two and the result is just what the client wanted.



STYLIST: BERYL CROWTHER ASSISTANT: ANNE BOLLARD PHOTOGRAPHER: PAULO BURSATO

STYLIST: BERYL CROWTHER ASSISTANT: ANNE BOLLARD PHOTOGRAPHER: PAULO BURSATO

## A SPECTACULAR STIR-FRY

**The styling challenge:** *Stir-fries and pasta sink flat onto the plate and rarely do the ingredients land in a balanced way. The noodles look dull and cold and some ingredients may end up overcooked (left).*

**How to style it:** *First the carefully selected ingredients are cooked individually so they're perfect. A mound of instant mashed potato is used as a base to get some height and stability. Noodles are coated with liquid glucose to make them look hot and shiny. The ingredients are arranged to give a casual appearance that belies the amount of time spent with tweezers to get perfectly looped noodles and balanced colour.*

**The result:** *An appetising and colourful stir-fry that looks fresh and hot.*

## THE PERFECT CHOOK

**The styling challenge:** *Regular roast chook dries up, shrinks and browns unevenly. And while it may smell great at the dining table, it looks pretty unappealing in a photo (above left).*

**How to style it:** *First decide on the chook's best angle — in this shoot, the stylists consulted the photographer and his assistant and the raw chook's credentials were discussed at some length. Then the skin at the foot and neck ends is trimmed and sewn in place. It's carefully trussed, firmly stuffed with paper and oven-cooked for about twenty minutes to 'set' the flesh. The skin is 'cooked' to brown crispiness using a coat of soy sauce and paprika and a heat gun. A coat of oil makes it look hot and juicy. In our shot a skin graft has even been used to get a pasty area near the wing looking perfect.*

**The result:** *Plump, juicy, perfect roast chicken.*

## Behind the scenes

We started with identical chooks, muffins from the same batch and the same ingredients, and it was a hard day's work for four professionals to get these shots looking perfect — especially compared with how they looked without titivation. No wonder yours doesn't look the same.

## TRICKS OF THE TRADE

So what are some of the techniques stylists might use to counteract the tendency for food to discolour, sag and drip? Try these for size.

**Meat** tends to dry out and shrink when you cook it, so chances are the meat in the photo is only partially cooked, to keep it plump and juicy. Then it may be browned up with a coat of gravy browning or soy sauce and a hot air gun or blowtorch called upon to crisp up the edges. A final coat of oil gives a hot, fresh-looking shine. The perfect chook, above, gives an idea of the effect. You can do something similar with sausages to avoid explosions and burnt bits: simmer them first, dry them, then apply the paint, torch and oil.

A **hamburger** straight out of the wrap doesn't usually look too inspiring (as most people would have experienced). That's why creating a burger photo is a long and involved process. First find the perfect bun — you might have to trawl through hundreds, and even then it might need a few more sesame seeds glued on in strategic places. The meat patty is given a make-up job as described on the previous page, and perfect tomato slices and lettuce frills are chosen — hard to believe, but one stylist told us it might take her four lettuces to find the perfect leaf. Then you've got to construct the thing — layers are separated with cardboard or plastic to stop sogging and squashing, and pins hold it all in place and make sure the lettuce sits just so (see above).

You know what happens to **breakfast cereal** when it sits in milk — soggy cereal's not a good look. How to fix it? PVA glue does a much better job than milk. The flakes stay put *and* stay crisp.

If you're shooting a slice of **cake**, the air and lights make it dry out — but a shot of hairspray gets it back looking fresh and yummy.

Ever noticed **chocolate sauce** doesn't stay put on top of ice cream for long? Get it to stay by cutting out a sauce-splodge-shaped piece of paper towel and putting it on the ice cream — then the sauce sticks to the towel.

And on the subject of **ice cream** — it melts, and fast. Some stylists still work with real ice cream — in editorial shots a bit of melt is OK: it makes the reader feel they want to lick it right off the page. But in product shots, it's got to look perfect and that's not easy — one tutorial on getting the perfect scoop of real ice cream is almost five A4 pages long and advises having as many as 20 two-litre tubs of ice cream on hand for each shot, not to mention more than 20 kilos of dry ice and an electric saw.

If you're not advertising the ice cream, you might decide to go fake — coloured mashed potato can make a reasonable substitute. Or instead there are various recipes using corn syrup, margarine, icing sugar and colouring to achieve just the right consistency — depending whether you want super-premium ice cream or a lower-fat look.

**Maple syrup** soaks into **pancakes** and goes a nasty dark colour — but not when you've sprayed the pancakes with fabric protector. Pin your carefully 'scattered' blueberries in place so they don't get swept away with the syrup flow.

Plastic **ice cubes** (usually acrylic) don't melt and spoil a drink shot. And to get that frosted look on the glass, spray it with a dulling spray and then give it a spritz with water spray.

PAULO BURCATO

*Just some of the tools food stylists use to get a shot that holds up till the photographer's finished.*

STYLIST: BERYL CROWTHER ASSISTANT: ANNE BOLLARD PHOTOGRAPHER: PAULO BURSATO

## A BEAUTIFUL BURGER

The styling challenge: *The meat is heavy and squashes everything beneath it. The salad slides sideways and the sauce and beetroot ooze out (far left).*
How to style it: *The meat is only lightly cooked and the edges browned with a blow torch. The bun, like the other ingredients, is selected for perfection (in this case the top and base come from two different buns). After lettuce frills are carefully pinned in place, a cardboard platform supported by pieces of toothpick is constructed to hold the weight of the meat off the lettuce and bun. The other ingredients are artistically arranged and may also need to be pinned in place. Make-up remover pads do a good job of soaking up beetroot juices. The final touch is an artistic injection of tomato sauce thickened with tomato paste.*
The result: *A tall, symmetrical, balanced hamburger creation.*

Anyone who's served up a slice of **pie** knows how it can disintegrate before you get it to the plate. Make it more stable by baking a pie full of instant mashed potato, then cut a slice, scoop out a little potato and put the filling on the side — the chunks neatly pinned in place.

If you want a perfect drip of sauce glistening on the side of your **dessert**, use a small piece of soft wax shaped like a drop and put it in place, then coat the drop with sauce for a perfect mid-drip shot.

If you don't want **tomato sauce** to run everywhere, mixing it with some tomato paste thickens it enough so it stays perfectly in place. Put it exactly where you want it with a syringe.

A simple **white sauce** with the right mix of colouring can double for sauces which are much more delicate beasts, like hollandaise.

A thin painted-on coat of glycerine makes **seafood** look juicy. And tossing some liquid glucose through **noodles** makes them keep a hot, fresh look.

**Stir-fries** and things like **pasta sauce** are often not cooked according to the recipe — each vegie is selected and individually cooked, then put together with the sauce. Often the careful arrangement designed to look random is the result of painstaking work.

## THE WACKY ...

We came across some truly bizarre techniques and suggestions while researching this article. The stylists we spoke to were by degrees horrified or amused by them — but they generally weren't surprised that someone, somewhere (usually in the US) may have given it a go:

**Maple syrup** is much more popular in the US than here, and there are all sorts of tricks to getting it looking right, the most bizarre of which we heard being to use motor oil instead (as long as it's the pancakes being advertised, not the syrup).

If your **Swiss cheese** isn't looking photogenic enough, enhance its holes — use little round cutters or even straws for small holes.

Spray deodorant can give a nice frosting to **grapes**.

The perfectly shaped **chicken leg** can be achieved by injecting mashed potato under the skin and coating.

STYLIST: BERYL CROWTHER ASSISTANT: ANNE BOLLARD PHOTOGRAPHER: PAULO BURSATO

## MUFFIN MAGIC

The styling challenge: *Cake and muffins can look flat, dry and uninteresting (top).*
How to style it: *The muffin is carefully broken apart and placed on the plate. Tweezers are used to tease out the crumbs to give pleasing shadows and a moist, crumbly look. The fruit in the muffin is excavated so you can see it more clearly. Fresh blueberries — only ever handled with tweezers or gloves to avoid fingerprints — are blue-tacked in place. The blueberry leaves were the most difficult part of this shot. It took 25 minutes to get them arranged to the stylist's and photographer's satisfaction. A shake of icing sugar and an artistically placed fork finish the shot.*
The result: *Still life with muffin — true art.*

# TAKE THE PUZZLE OUT OF INVESTING

VANESSA MARSHALL (BELOW) JOHN PHILLIPSON, JACQUI FRY

Managed funds put your money into a range of investments, letting you spread the risk over different markets. Best of all, you don't have to become an instant expert.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- **Managed funds** *let you buy investments you might not be able to afford on your own, by pooling your money with that of many other investors.*
- **With over 3000** *managed funds, though, it's hard to make a choice. We looked at unit trusts with a five-year track record and chose five that have performed well over the long term in each of the most popular market sectors — see page 17.*

Have you always wanted to get into investing but don't really know how to go about it? The stockmarket's a bit daunting and it's too hard to make a good choice — especially in the current uncertain times?

If so, managed funds might be for you. They're a convenient way to invest and you can leave the picking of shares and other investments to the experts, who'll monitor changes in the investment climate and provide you with regular reports on your fund's performance.

Managed funds pool the money of many investors to buy investments you otherwise might not be able to afford. For example, $1000 can buy you part-ownership in a fund that invests in 50 to 60 different Australian companies.

Some investors prefer to be more actively involved and pick investments themselves, and if you make a lucky choice — like investing in the first Telstra float — you can outperform managed funds. However, as the investors in the second tranche of Telstra (T2) discovered, sometimes you can get badly hurt.

Even if you prefer to invest directly, consider adding managed funds to your portfolio. They allow you to spread your money (diversify) over different markets, including shares, property, mortgage, the money market or even dip into some international investments. By diversifying, your returns aren't as volatile and may even be higher in the long-run.

Managed funds also offer economies of scale that make the cost of investing cheaper than buying the investments directly. However, there are still quite a few costs involved. (Check *Fees*, page 15, to see what you'll be charged and how to avoid some of them.)

## WHAT'S OUT THERE?

The most popular type of managed fund is a unit trust. They allow you to buy individual units, each of which is an equal share in the investments held by the trust. Other types are super funds, allocated pensions and annuities, and older-style insurance and friendly society bonds. This article concentrates on **unit trusts**.

They're run by a 'single responsible entity' — the manager, which refers to a company rather than a person. To invest you need to apply to the fund's manager, using the application form in the current prospectus.

You can contact the fund manager directly for the prospectus, or indirectly through a financial adviser or

a discount broker. While a financial adviser can give you advice tailored for your specific situation, discount brokers might be a good option if you already know what you want, as they charge lower fees.

Depending on how much you invest, you'll receive a number of units based on the current unit price, which reflects the value of the fund's investments. The value of each unit then continues to vary with the rises and falls of the market.

Managed funds invest in a wide variety of different investment sectors, called asset classes. Examples are:

- Shares.
- Property.
- Fixed interest.
- Mortgages.
- Cash.

'Sector funds' invest in only one of these asset classes; 'multi sector funds' allow you to diversify between different ones. The table, page 17, includes both.

## WHAT KIND OF FUND IS RIGHT FOR ME?

This depends mainly on your goals, risk profile and the timeframe you have in mind — your 'investment strategy'. A financial adviser can help you work this out (but see *How to get good advice*, above right, for what to watch for). Then you (or your adviser) can look for funds with an investment strategy that matches yours. See *Types of fund*, page 15, to find out what the options are.

Shares are the most volatile type of investment (meaning their value can go up and down a lot); cash is the least. So you need to be prepared to leave your money in share funds for at least five to seven years, to ride out any lows and be able to sell when their price is high. This level of risk and uncertainty won't suit everybody.

The trade-off for higher volatility is that higher risk usually means higher returns in the long run. In the last decade, shares produced extraordinary returns and downturns were short-lived. But markets can turn sour and it may take a long time until they come up again.

If this happens you need to be able to sit back and not panic. Taking your money out after a share market fall would crystallise your loss.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Use *Types of fund* to help decide which type you want to invest in. Then take our table as a starting point and look at the funds in the asset class(es) you've chosen.

Get as much information as possible about any fund you're interested in, including its prospectus. Use our checklist (page 14) to see what to look for.

However, when using our table (or any other performance listing), be aware that past performance is just that. While those funds have all performed well in the last five years, there's no guarantee that they'll continue to do so in the future.

After you've satisfied yourself that the funds you've picked out are right for you, choose at least a couple, rather than giving all your money to one manager. By diversifying you'll reduce your risk.

Another smart step is to 'drip-feed' money into managed funds by using a regular savings plan, smoothing out volatility by buying in at various prices. This is a great way to make your wealth grow without too much pain.

Once you've made your choice, stick to it — chopping and changing could cost you money. Fund managers use many different techniques, and depending on market conditions, sometimes one style works better than another. Keep in mind that managed funds are a long-term investment, so you should expect short-term fluctuations and don't need to be panicked by them.

If you're seriously concerned about the performance of one of your investments, get financial advice before you take action.

## HOW TO GET GOOD ADVICE

*If you invest through a financial adviser, ask them whether they have a relationship (like a special commission) with the fund they're recommending. You want a fund that's right for you, not for them.*

*Our last study of financial advisers found that the standard of advice is inconsistent. Almost one in five advisers failed to meet the requirements. For more on how to find a good adviser, read* Who to trust with your life savings *(CHOICE, October 1998), or at www.choice.com.au.*

## ASIA NO MORE?

Two years ago Rhonda and Mark Smith (not their real names) started investing in managed funds. They'd already paid back a big chunk of their mortgage and used a line of credit based on their equity in their home to pay for the investment.

Over the next few months they put around $10,000 into three Australian share funds and another $20,000 in a fund that invests in Asian shares.

"Our investment in the Australian funds didn't do that well last year, but we've gained around 10% over the two years," says Mark.

However, the Asian investment is 50% down. "We're not happy about this, of course, but we're in it for the long term and hopefully they'll come up again," says Rhonda.

RHONDA THWAITE

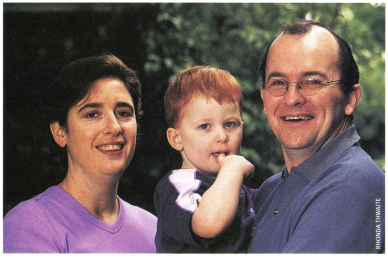
## INVESTING FOR YOUR KIDS

Amelia and Rick Manning (not their real names) have a three-year-old son, Michael.

"Last year his grandparents gave us $1000 for him and we put it in a savings account," says Amelia.

After consulting a financial adviser, they decided to put the money in managed funds.

"As we can leave it there for a long time, the money will hopefully grow much better than in the savings account, where it earned less than a dollar last year," says Amelia.



RHONDA TINNAIE

## Where to get information

- Before you invest, a fund must provide you with its current prospectus. This will tell you the types of investment a fund manager can buy and whether it's designed to produce income or growth or a combination of both.
- Useful in your research is data from rating agencies such as ASSIRT, Morningstar, van Eyk or InvestorWeb. However, their opinions may differ for some funds as they all use a different methodology for rating the funds. Their ratings are also partly based on past performance, and there's recently been some concern about their value in predicting the future performance of funds.
- Some online discount brokers have fund profiles and other information on their websites.
- Financial advisers/planners have access to managed funds research and should be able to answer your questions. The Financial Planners Association (FPA) can give you a list of planners in your area. Contact it on 1800 626 393, or visit the website: www.fpa.asn.au.
- Before investing in a managed fund, check whether the 'responsible entity' is licensed and that the scheme is registered with the Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC). Contact ASIC on 1300 300 630 or check the website: www.asic.gov.au.
- The National Information Centre on Retirement Investments Inc (NICRI) provides free information about financial planning and specific investment products. Contact it by calling 1800 020 110 or (02) 6281 5744; you can also look at its free factsheets online at www.nicri.org.au.

## CHECKLIST

Use the answers to these questions to compare similar funds. Most of the information can be found in the fund's prospectus.

- What are the manager's risk and return objectives, as stated in the prospectus, and do they match your investment strategy?
- What has been the short, medium and long-term performance of the fund and does it match the manager's objectives?
- How volatile have returns been and does this match the manager's risk objectives?
- Are there any current issues you should be aware of, such as key staff leaving the fund manager, or a likelihood of the manager shutting down the fund (meaning you would have to reinvest your money somewhere else, maybe having to pay fees and tax for the privilege)? A financial adviser might be able to tell you.
- How easy would it be to get your money back — ask about the fund's redemption policy. For example, can you request withdrawals by phone or online, how long does it usually take, is there a minimum account balance and in what amounts can you redeem money?
- What fees are involved (see *Fees*, below right)?
- Is it possible to switch your money to another fund with the same manager, and would you have to pay a fee for this?
- What's the minimum initial investment and what are the minimum amounts you can add to it?
- Can you make regular extra contributions (a savings plan)?
- How often does the fund manager distribute income and can you reinvest this in the fund?
- Taxation is a complex issue, especially now the 50% capital gains tax discount can be available for some funds' returns. Check with your financial planner or accountant whether a fund is suitable for your tax requirements.

### WORKING FOR YOU

**The new Financial Services Reform Legislation will come into effect next month.**

**In the Consumers' Association's submissions to the legislation and constant lobbying work, we've been successful in asking for better fee disclosure. We're now aiming for 'dollar-based disclosure', so you'd be able to see dollar for dollar how much you'd pay.**

**We're also monitoring ads, aiming to stop managers highlighting in them either only their best-performing funds or periods when performance looks particularly good. If you come across any examples, send them to our money policy officer, Catherine Wolthuizen (right), at the address on page 2.**

RHONDA TINNAIE

# TYPES OF FUND

The *Growth or income?* table on page 16 gives an overview of the characteristics of different fund types, while the main table, *Funds that performed well over the past five years*, page 17, divides funds up into some of the sectors described below.

There are basically two different types of fund:

- Sector funds, which invest in one of the following areas.
- Multi sector (balanced) funds, which invest in several.

## SHARE FUNDS

These invest in the Australian and/or international share markets. For our table we looked at the two most popular types: diversified funds investing across the broad Australian share market, and diversified international share funds that invest in the major share markets around the world.

Other popular types are:

- Funds investing only in one specific class of shares, such as resources.
- 'Ethical' funds.
- Funds investing in small (emerging) companies or big (leader) companies.
- International funds investing in only one country, such as the US, one region (Asia, for example) or a specific class, such as technology.
- Index funds: instead of actively picking stocks, the manager buys stocks matching an index, such as the All Ordinaries in Australia or the Dow Jones in the US. For this reason you usually pay lower fees for them.

Share funds are very volatile, rising and falling with the value of the shares they invest in.

## PROPERTY FUNDS

There are four different types:

- Listed property trusts often invest in only one type of property (like shopping centres or hotels). They're listed on the stockmarket and, unlike other managed funds, you'd invest in them using a broker.
- Unlisted property trusts directly manage and own real estate. Withdrawal from them may be difficult if a lot of investors want to redeem their money at the same time after a crash — the trust may need to sell properties to cover this.
- Property security funds usually invest in listed property trusts. These are the type covered in our table.
- Diversified property funds usually invest in a number of listed and/or unlisted property trusts, sometimes adding direct property investments.

Property funds can be volatile. Some borrow funds to invest, which makes them more risky.

## Fees

Make sure you understand what fees you'll pay before you invest — you'll usually pay them even if the fund produces a loss, and a small difference in fees can mean thousands of dollars in the long term.

- **Entry fee:** Upfront fee (up to 5% of your investment); also payable whenever you add money to the fund.
- **Exit fee:** Percentage fee some funds charge when you leave. In many cases this will reduce on a sliding scale and may not be applied after a certain time. In our survey we excluded funds that still apply it after three years.
- **MER (management expense ratio):** Ongoing fees, expressed as a percentage of the total funds under management, and usually ranging from 0.8% to 2.4%. They include the manager's fee, the trailing commission to your financial adviser (see below) and other fees like audit fees.

Some funds are more expensive to run than others, with international share funds incurring the highest cost, so the MER is most useful when comparing similar funds. Performance figures like the ones in our table are calculated after deducting the MER.

- **Trail:** Ongoing commission to the adviser or discount broker who introduced you to the fund. It's included in the MER and usually ranges from 0.3% to 0.6%. On top of the trail some financial advisers charge an **adviser service fee** for ongoing service.

### NEGOTIATE YOUR FEES

If you go to a financial adviser, always ask whether they can give you a better deal:

- If you pay for the advice you get (as opposed to the adviser getting a commission on the investment they recommend), your adviser will usually rebate the entry fee. Otherwise check out a discount broker to find one that doesn't charge an entry fee on the fund you've chosen. Don't go to the fund manager directly as it'll usually charge you this fee.
- One fee even online discount brokers receive is the trailing commission. Some fee-based advisers rebate it to you, but this isn't common.
- If you're charged an adviser service fee (see left), make sure the ongoing service is worth what you'll be paying. Also ask them whether they've taken the trailing commission into account. If you change your adviser you need to inform the fund manager, otherwise you'll keep paying the adviser service fee.

You might be offered a choice between different fee structures — for example, no entry fee but a higher ongoing fee. Calculate a dollar figure to compare exactly which option works out cheaper (you can ask your adviser to do this for you).

## Growth or income?

| Fund type | Volatility | Returns | Timeframe (years) | Income/ growth |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internat. shares | High | High | 5-7+ | Both |
| Aust. shares | High | High | 5-7+ | Both |
| Property | Med-high | Med-high | 5+ | Both |
| Fixed interest | Medium | Medium | 3-5+ | Income |
| Mortgage | Medium | Medium | 3-5+ | Income |
| Cash | Low-med | Low-med | 1+ | Income |

*Source: Investment & Financial Services Association (IFSA).*

### FIXED-INTEREST FUNDS

They invest in Australian or international bonds. Bonds are issued by governments or companies to borrow money from investors for a fixed term and interest rate.

Bonds may be traded; they lose value when interest rates go up, as this means newly issued bonds offer higher returns.

### MORTGAGE FUNDS

These lend money to companies and individuals, and may be secured by the property bought or built. They may lose money if the borrower defaults. The funds in our table reduce the risks by lending money to a mix of borrowers.

### CASH FUNDS

These invest in the money market and sometimes work nearly like a savings account, with a cheque book and ATM access attached.

We didn't include them in our table as they're more suitable for short-term investing.

### ALL YOUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET?

Instead of investing in a sector fund you can dip into a number of sectors at the same time by using **multi sector funds** (also called balanced funds).

Not all balanced funds are the same; our table looks at all four different types: multi sector 30, 50, 70 and 70+. The number represents the percentage invested in risky assets like shares, so conservative investors would be more interested in multi sector 30, while more aggressive investors might look at multi sector 70 or 70+.

### HOW WE CHOSE THE FUNDS IN THE TABLE

The selection was made with the assistance of research company ASSIRT, and a panel of industry experts helped us to work out the criteria for it.

ASSIRT has over 3000 managed funds in its database, covering the vast majority of funds available in Australia. About 650 of them are unit trusts. We looked at retail unit trusts (open for individuals to buy into) with a track record of at least five years. This cut the list down to about 350.

We chose the most popular fund types for a long-term investor (see *Growth or income?*, above) and excluded funds that:

- Are smaller than $10 million.
- Have a minimum investment of more than $5000.
- Still have exit fees after an investment time of three years.
- Are closed for new business.

This left us with about 150 funds. For these we then looked at their returns after ongoing fees and at how volatile those returns were.

The top five funds in each asset class are listed in alphabetical order in the table. While they've performed well in the past, there's no guarantee they'll keep this up in the future. If you're interested in any of them, get their prospectus and use our checklist (page 14) to find out more about them, and talk to a financial adviser about your investment strategy and which funds would be appropriate for you to invest in. ■

**1 Rolling six-month negative returns**

This shows in how many rolling six-month periods over the last five years (= 55 rolling six-month periods) the fund has made a loss. The fewer the better.

**2 ASSIRT fund rating (where available)**

ASSIRT's rating for particular funds ranges from one to five stars. 75% of the rating is based on qualitative factors such as investment management capability and product features, with the remaining 25% considering a range of performance measures. Not all funds commission a rating from ASSIRT, but where it's available it gives more information about a fund than simple performance figures. For example, five stars indicate ASSIRT considers it has very strong management and a comprehensive investment strategy as well as strong past performance. For more on the rating, go to www.assirt.com.au.

Other rating agencies provide ratings of different funds, based on various criteria — see *Where to get information*, page 14.

**3 MER**

The percentage of your investment that goes in ongoing fees (see *Fees*, page 15).

**4 Exit fee**

The maximum exit fee that can apply if you sell your units within three years of investing. We excluded funds that didn't go down to a zero exit fee after an investment period of three years.

VANESSA MARSHALL


## THANK YOU

- ASSIRT collaborated with us in this project, helping to put together our criteria for including a fund in the table and making their comprehensive database available to us.
- A panel of industry and consumer experts also helped us with the criteria for fund selection and the issues discussed in this article. Thanks to Arun Abey (IPAC/FPA), Richard Gilbert (IFSA), Chris Hall (KPMG), Basil La Brooy (NICRI), Scott McKenzie (Financial Force/Australian Investors Association) and Mark Thomas (Dimensional Fund Advisers/Securities Institute).

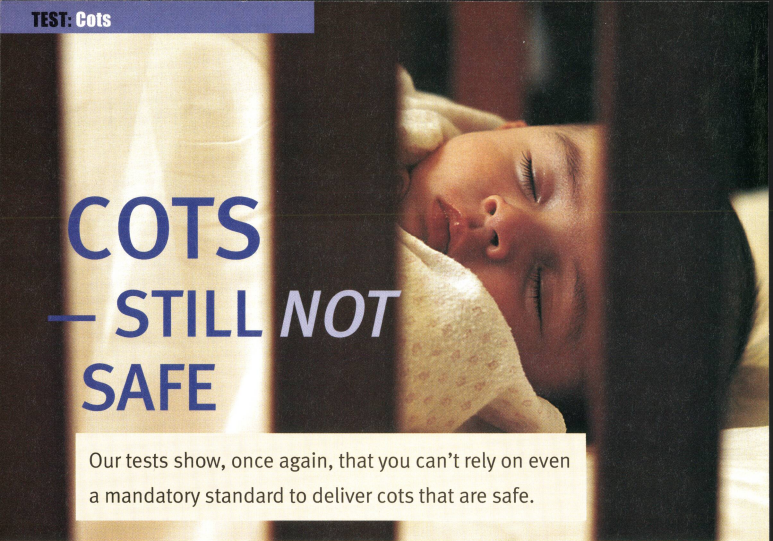
# Funds that performed well over the past five years

| Type of fund* | Fund name (alphabetically within groups) | Five-year performance (%) | Three-year performance (%) | One-year performance (%) | 1 6-month negative return | 2 ASSIRT fund rating | Size ($m)** | 3 MER (%) | 4 Max. exit fee (%) | Minimum initial investment ($) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Diversified international shares** | Advance MultiFund Internat Sharemarket | 17.73 | 9.66 | 3.04 | 14 / 55 | ★★★★ | 178.79 | 2.05 | 0 | 2000 |
| | Dresdner International Opportunity | 18.81 | 14.23 | –31.93 | 14 / 55 | ★★★★ | 48.24 | 2.14 | 0 | 1000 |
| | Hunter Hall Value Growth Trust | 24.11 | 18.47 | 0.27 | 3 / 55 | ★★★★ | 195.39 | 2.12 | 0 | 5000 |
| | MLC MasterKey Platinum Global | 20.31 | 20.12 | –9.05 | 9 / 55 | Not rated | 1342.21 | 2.23 | 0 | 5000 |
| | United SMF SLF International | 13.23 | 6.32 | –20.70 | 12 / 55 | Not rated | 62.70 | 2.13 | 3 | 2000 |
| **Diversified Australian shares** | AMP Blue Chip | 13.91 | 14.39 | –4.29 | 7 / 55 | ★★★★★ | 192.33 | 2.04 | 0 | 1500 |
| | AMP Equity | 13.66 | 15.15 | –3.82 | 7 / 55 | ★★★★★ | 576.40 | 2.04 | 0 | 1500 |
| | ANZ Australian Imputation Trust | 14.31 | 13.62 | –0.73 | 6 / 55 | Not rated | 321.43 | 2.05 | 0 | 5000 |
| | Colonial First State Imputation | 15.02 | 15.53 | 1.25 | 6 / 55 | ★★★★★ | 3624.31 | 1.76 | 0 | 1000 |
| | Merrill Lynch Imputation | 13.78 | 9.03 | –2.75 | 7 / 55 | ★★★★★ | 860.70 | 1.79 | 0 | 1000 |
| **Property securities** | Colonial First State Property Securities | 12.09 | 8.14 | 15.71 | 7 / 55 | ★★★★ | 185.59 | 1.50 | 0 | 1000 |
| | Deutsche Palidan Property Securities | 11.76 | 7.49 | 15.43 | 8 / 55 | ★★★★ | 436.33 | 0.75 | 0 | 5000 |
| | HSBC Australian Property Securities | 11.16 | 7.18 | 15.72 | 9 / 55 | ★★★★ | 68.90 | 1.70 | 0 | 1000 |
| | STL Premium Property Fund | 11.79 | 7.84 | 15.23 | 8 / 55 | Not rated | 39.15 | 1.21 | 0 | 500 |
| | Westpac Inv Chce Aus Property Securities | 11.25 | 6.89 | 14.50 | 10 / 55 | Not rated | 144.43 | 1.42 | 0 | 5000 |
| **Fixed interest** | Macquarie Gilt Edge Bond | 6.83 | 4.96 | 5.96 | 0 / 55 | ★★★★ | 97.51 | 1.51 | 0 | 5000 |
| | MLC MasterKey Australian Bond | 6.80 | 4.58 | 9.21 | 8 / 55 | Not rated | 45.88 | 1.23 | 0 | 5000 |
| | STL Premium Fixed Interest | 7.23 | 4.80 | 8.99 | 10 / 55 | Not rated | 32.70 | 0.99 | 0 | 500 |
| | United SMF SLF Fixed Interest | 9.01 | 6.58 | 10.62 | 5 / 55 | Not rated | 116.57 | 1.23 | 3 | 2000 |
| | Westpac Inv Chce Australian Bond Fund | 7.04 | 4.88 | 9.63 | 8 / 55 | Not rated | 95.25 | 1.10 | 0 | 5000 |
| **Mortgage funds** | AXA Australian Income | 5.67 | 5.39 | 5.32 | 0 / 55 | ★★★★★ | 921.90 | 1.15 | 1.5 | 2000 |
| | EQT Mortgage Income Fund | 6.36 | 5.93 | 6.01 | 0 / 55 | Not rated | 156.54 | 1.20 | 0 | 5000 |
| | Howard Mortgage | 6.37 | 6.15 | 6.47 | 0 / 55 | ★★★★★ | 1473.15 | 1.46 | 1.65 | 1000 |
| | Perpetual Monthly Income | 6.03 | 5.91 | 6.32 | 0 / 55 | ★★★★ | 509.90 | 1.30 | 1.5 | 2000 |
| | Trust Company Fixed Term Mortgage No 2 | 6.08 | 5.63 | 5.97 | 0 / 55 | Not rated | 72.97 | 1.09 | 0 | 2000 |
| **Multi sector 30** | ANZ Conservative Trust | 7.83 | 5.94 | 1.72 | 2 / 55 | Not rated | 275.80 | 2.05 | 0 | 5000 |
| | Colonial First State Conservative | 8.35 | 8.28 | 7.70 | 2 / 55 | ★★★ | 157.33 | 1.25 | 0 | 1000 |
| | Commonwealth Balanced Fund | 8.97 | 6.46 | –1.87 | 5 / 55 | Not rated | 1221.52 | 1.60 | 0 | 2500 |
| | MLC MasterKey Horizon 2 Income | 7.47 | 5.26 | 4.76 | 3 / 55 | Not rated | 89.72 | 1.76 | 0 | 5000 |
| | United SMF SLF Capital Stable | 7.81 | 6.44 | 4.73 | 1 / 55 | Not rated | 125.15 | 1.88 | 3 | 2000 |
| **Multi sector 50** | Aust Ethical Balanced | 8.64 | 10.38 | 9.81 | 1 / 55 | Not rated | 58.90 | 2.34 | 0 | 1000 |
| | Colonial First State Balanced | 10.62 | 10.53 | 5.26 | 4 / 55 | ★★★★ | 287.13 | 1.47 | 0 | 1000 |
| | NRMA Diversified Stable Trust | 7.60 | 6.31 | 3.30 | 5 / 55 | Not rated | 41.16 | 1.65 | 3 | 2000 |
| | Suncorp Investment Regular Payment | 7.05 | 5.46 | 0.74 | 3 / 55 | Not rated | 23.17 | 1.95 | 0 | 2000 |
| | Investors Mutual: World Wide Strategy | 6.93 | 4.36 | 0.55 | 10 / 55 | Not rated | 18.96 | 2.66 | 0 | 1000 |
| **Multi sector 70** | ANZ Balanced Trust | 9.90 | 8.00 | –3.11 | 6 / 55 | Not rated | 162.77 | 2.05 | 0 | 5000 |
| | Colonial First State Diversified | 10.52 | 8.31 | –4.77 | 9 / 55 | ★★★★★ | 887.31 | 1.76 | 0 | 1000 |
| | ING Active Growth | 10.59 | 8.42 | 3.44 | 5 / 55 | ★★★★ | 72.57 | 1.79 | 0 | 1000 |
| | Portfolio Care: Inv Serv Experts Ch Balanced | 10.62 | 9.03 | –3.12 | 6 / 55 | Not rated | 26.80 | 2.48 | 0 | 1500 |
| | Portfolio Care: Inv Serv Experts Ch Growth | 9.74 | 8.14 | –3.90 | 8 / 55 | Not rated | 13.62 | 2.63 | 0 | 1500 |
| **Multi sector 70+** | AMP High Growth | 9.96 | 6.85 | –10.34 | 5 / 55 | ★★★ | 167.08 | 2.04 | 0 | 1500 |
| | ANZ Growth Trust | 10.60 | 8.76 | –5.29 | 8 / 55 | Not rated | 99.08 | 2.05 | 0 | 5000 |
| | Commonwealth Growth Fund | 10.41 | 7.17 | –3.88 | 6 / 55 | Not rated | 619.57 | 1.61 | 0 | 2500 |
| | ING Tax Effective Income | 12.82 | 8.46 | 13.63 | 8 / 55 | ★★★★ | 113.10 | 1.73 | 0 | 1000 |
| | JB Were Diversified Growth | 9.65 | 7.33 | –3.66 | 8 / 55 | ★★★ | 27.09 | 1.82 | 0 | 5000 |

* *See pages 15–16 for an explanation of these.*

** *Rounded to two decimal places.*

*Performance data from ASSIRT, current as at September 30, 2001; fund ratings current as at November 30, 2001. Fund performance is calculated after ongoing fees (MER). All care has been taken to ensure data is accurate and complete. Past performance is no indication of a fund's future performance. Don't make investment decisions without reading the prospectus and getting expert financial advice.*



# COTS — STILL *NOT* SAFE

Our tests show, once again, that you can't rely on even a mandatory standard to deliver cots that are safe.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- **Only one out of nine cots** *tested can be fully recommended: three years after the cots standard was made mandatory, failures still abound.*
- **Three cots failed** *more than one safety test*
- **Four more** *had no major problems, but still failed one of the standard's safety tests.*
- **One cot is potentially dangerous,** *and CHOICE thinks it should be removed from sale.*
- **Our** ***What to look for*** **list** *on page 21 can help you check for yourself whether a cot is OK.*

It's been more than three years since the cots standard was made mandatory in Australia. So you'd be forgiven for expecting the cots on sale at major retailers to conform to that standard. Unfortunately we can only repeat the story we've told so many times: most cots in our latest test failed one or more of the standard's safety tests.

This time we tested nine cots, all widely available from department and speciality stores, ranging in price from $239 to $550. And of these, we can only recommend one: the **IKEA Gulliver** — see the profile, above right.

It's not that the remaining eight cots all pose major safety risks — though one does, and we think it should be recalled and removed from sale — but they all fail to meet at least one of the standard's safety requirements.

Four models failed just one test, for finger entrapments or minor protrusions. Though potentially painful and distressing for a baby whose finger is caught, in our opinion these cots present very minor hazards only, considering the location of the offending holes, gaps or protrusions. They're profiled in the 'borderline' section on the right.

Three other models failed at least one other — sometimes more — clauses of the mandatory standard. They all had limb entrapment hazards. One other model (the **TOUCHWOOD**) failed the finger entrapment test. But it has an additional, more serious fault: the dropside can easily be dislodged. The standard's requirements don't cover this aspect adequately, but we think this is a major construction fault. See *What about the rest?*, page 20, for details.

## WHAT TO BUY

| | |
|---|---|
| **PASSED ALL SAFETY TESTS** | |
| **IKEA Gulliver** | $239 |
| **BORDERLINE: Minor hazards only** | |
| **AUSTRALIAN NURSERY DISTRIBUTORS Bellevue** | $370 |
| **GRO-YEARS Cabin Crib Settler No 10** | $399 |
| **INFANT AUSTRALIA Horizon Wooden Cot # 5906-GN** | $249 |
| **MOTHER'S CHOICE Cambridge III # 5901-GN** | $287 |

## HOW WE TESTED

In co-operation with the Infant and Nursery Products Association of Australia (INPAA), we selected for testing those parts of the standard, AS/NZS 2172:1995 *Cots for household use — safety requirements*, that are

# Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled. Prices shown are those we paid in September 2001.

## RECOMMENDED

**Only the IKEA cot passed all the standard's most important safety requirements.**

### IKEA GULLIVER

*Price:* $239
*Manufacturer/distributor:* Ikea
*Warranty:* Unlimited refund policy for faulty products.
*Origin:* Ukraine
*Dimensions (L x W x H, cm):* 137 x 79 x 88

GOOD POINTS

- Base can be adjusted to two positions.

BAD POINTS

- No castors, so moving the cot is difficult.
- No dropsides, making it more difficult to lift a baby in and out of the cot with the mattress base in the lower position.
- No teething rail.

MINOR PROBLEM

- Informative marking on the mattress base isn't permanent: a label is simply stuck to the base. After our 1999 test, Ikea told us it would change the label to an indelible stamp.

PROFILES: VANESSA MARSHALL

## BORDERLINE

**The four cots below (listed in alphabetical order) failed one of the standard's safety tests. However, in our judgment the hazards are minor.**

### AUSTRALIAN NURSERY DISTRIBUTORS BELLEVUE

*Price:* $370
*Manufacturer/distributor:* Australian Nursery Distributors
*Warranty:* 1 year
*Origin:* Taiwan
*Dimensions (L x W x H, cm):* 136 x 78 x 123

GOOD POINTS

- Four castors, two of them with brakes.
- Dropside.
- Base can be adjusted to two positions.
- Teething strip.

BAD POINTS

- A child can trap their fingers between the mattress base and cot ends with the base in the upper position.
- Informative marking on the mattress base isn't permanent: it's simply stuck on.

### GRO-YEARS CABIN CRIB SETTLER NO 10

*Price:* $399
*Manufacturer/distributor:* Gro-Years Nursery Furniture
*Warranty:* 4 years
*Origin:* Australia
*Dimensions (L x W x H, cm):* 135 x 76 x 117

GOOD POINTS

- Four castors, all with brakes.
- Dropside.
- Base can be adjusted to two positions.

BAD POINTS

- No teething strip.

PROBLEM

- A child can hit their head on a minor protrusion of the dropside release latches.

### INFANT AUSTRALIA HORIZON WOODEN COT # 5906-GN

*Price:* $249
*Manufacturer/distributor:* IGC
*Warranty:* 1 year
*Origin:* Malaysia
*Dimensions (L x W x H, cm):* 138 x 76 x 109

GOOD POINTS

- Four castors, all with brakes.
- Dropside.
- Base can be adjusted to two positions.
- Teething strip.

PROBLEM

- A child can trap their fingers in the bottom dropside guides. The manufacturer told us it will change the dropside mechanism and modify the design.

### MOTHER'S CHOICE CAMBRIDGE III # 5901-GN

*Price:* $287
*Manufacturer/distributor:* IGC
*Warranty:* 1 year
*Origin:* Malaysia
*Dimensions (L x W x H, cm):* 136 x 79 x 112

GOOD POINTS

- Four castors, all with brakes.
- Dropside.
- Base can be adjusted to two positions.
- Teething strip.

PROBLEM

- A child can trap their fingers in the bottom dropside guides. The manufacturer told us it's since changed the dropside mechanism.

## What about the rest?

**The remaining four cots failed several parts of the standard. They're listed here in alphabetical order, with manufacturers, prices we paid, and the problems we found.**

### BABY SAFE FEDERATION

**with standard side panels**
(KT Designs, $500)*

- With the cot base in the upper position, a child can trap their arms or legs between the cot ends and base.
- A child can trap their fingers between the base and fixed side, along the groove in the base and in the dropside guides when the side is down.

* The manufacturer told us this model is now discontinued, and that it will rectify the problems with finger and limb entrapment hazards.

### CENTURY FOLDAWAY CLASSIC

(Baby Love Products, $299)

- With the cot base in the lower position, a child can trap their arms or legs between the cot sides and base.
- A child can hit their head on a minor protrusion of the dropside release mechanism.
- The bolts that plug the unused holes for the second mattress base position are too long, splitting the wood slightly when you try to push them through.
- The information label isn't permanent: it's simply glued to the base.

### CHOICE COTS CC06

(Sunbury Manufacturing, $300)

- A child can trap their limbs between the base rails and ends at all four corners.
- A child can hit their head on minor protrusions of the dropside release latches.
- A finger could be trapped in the dropside release latches.

particularly relevant to child safety: dimensions, footholds, access fastening devices, dropside guides, bottom rails, holes and openings, protrusions, limb and head entrapment hazards and stability.

## MATTRESS SIZE

An ill-fitting mattress can seriously compromise a child's safety. If it's too short or narrow, a baby could slide down into the gaps between mattress and base and suffocate, or get their limbs or fingers caught. And if it's too thick, the distance between the mattress and the top rail can become too short, giving the potential for a child to climb out. That's why a well-fitting mattress is very important.

All the cots tested recommend a mattress size appropriate to the cot measurements. That's good news. Unfortunately, though, the cot sizes still vary, so there are still different mattress sizes recommended, and you can't just 'blindly' buy a cot mattress that'll fit any cot. In the future you may be able to, as the industry agreed earlier this year on one recommended cot mattress size (130 x 69 x 13 cm). Now it's over to the manufacturers to adopt this standard size.

## KEEPING THE INDUSTRY ON ITS TOES

Just as we found after our last cots test, many of the models tested claim to conform to the Australian Standard AS/NZS 2172, or to comply with other safety regulations, though our test results clearly show they don't.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and the state and territory consumer affairs agencies are responsible for monitoring compliance with the mandatory cots standard. After our 1999 test results, the ACCC told us it would continue to work with cot suppliers to eliminate the risks. But two years later, our test results show that more work still needs to be done.

Some of the failures we identified are minor, but we still think they breach the mandatory standard. More work also needs to be done to remove ambiguities from the standard and make it clear and straightforward to interpret. Regulators are aware that a new mandatory standard needs fine-tuning, so an update has been in the making for a few years now. As we went to print, the ACCC was meeting with the

**TOUCHWOOD ANTIQUE PINE VILLA**
(Touchwood Furniture, $550)

- This cot has a serious construction fault. If the cot end is pulled or jerked from outside, the dropside can fall out of the guides, and possibly out of the cot entirely. A baby could then get their head or limbs trapped, or fall out of the cot. This problem would worsen when the bolts loosen with regular use, though we could still push out the side after tightening the bolts.
- A child can trap their fingers between the mattress base and cot ends with the mattress base in the upper position.
- The hard plastic label is stapled to the base; it can be removed easily and the staples have sharp points.

## What to look for

**Take this checklist with you when you go shopping for a cot.**

### Safety

- Cots should be well-finished and made from quality materials. If they're made of **metal**, they shouldn't be bent or rusty, and their joints should be close-fitting and securely and cleanly welded. In **timber** cots, no dowels, nails and screws should be exposed above the surface, and the timber shouldn't have large knots, insect damage, cracks or splinters.
- There should be **no sharp edges or points** that could cause a cut or head injury, **no knobs or protrusions** that could catch a child's clothing, **no decorative transfers** that could come off easily, **no crossbars or trim** that could be used as a foothold, **no bumpers** or anything else inside the cot that has strings or ties.
- The enclosed **depth** must be at least 60 cm from the base to the top of the side (50 cm from the top of the mattress), or 40 cm in the base's upper position if it's adjustable (30 cm from the top of the mattress).
- The **gaps** between bars shouldn't be smaller than 50 mm or larger than 85 mm, to avoid trapping a child's limbs or head.
- The **dimensions** of **cots and mattresses** vary considerably. Make sure the mattress you buy corresponds to the manufacturer's size recommendations. Gaps between the mattress and cot sides shouldn't be larger than 25 mm so babies can't fall into the gaps and suffocate, or get their limbs caught.

### Features

- A **dropside** makes it easier to lift the baby into and out of the cot. The dropside mechanism shouldn't be too easily activated; it should operate smoothly and quietly, and have no protrusions that could snag a child's clothing.
- An **adjustable base** makes it easier for the carer to lift the child in and out of the cot when it's in its higher position, though this is suitable only for babies who can't sit up.
- **Castors** make it easier to move the cot. If it has four, at least two should have brakes. Two castors are OK, but you have to lift the cot and carry some of its weight when moving it.
- A **teething rail** is a plastic strip on top of the cot sides or ends.

Standards committee and assured us it would raise the issues we identified.

We also advised the ACCC of what we believe is a serious construction fault in the TOUCHWOOD cot that, in our opinion, warrants a recall and removal from sale. We hope it'll take appropriate action soon. As we went to print, the ACCC said it would decide on this particular case after discussions with the manufacturers and other relevant parties in Australia and New Zealand.

We hope regulators will strengthen their work with cot suppliers, so in future consumers can rely on a mandatory standard to deliver cots as safe as they should be. It's strange that while normal household appliances have in general become safer over the years, this very basic product for very vulnerable people can't seem to get it right. Given all this, CHOICE will keep testing cots for safety. ■

VANESSA MARSHALL

*The Touchwood dropside isn't secured to the cot ends — it sits in a channel. If the cot end is pulled or jerked, it's possible to dislodge the dropside from its channel. This could cause the dropside to fall from the cot. In this event, the likely hazards to a baby in the cot include finger, limb or head entrapment, as well as falling out of the cot. Our photo shows the dropside after falling out of its channels. The other cots in the test have much more secure guides for their dropsides.*

# Sparkling showers the easy way?

"Spray and go", "no scrubbing" and "never scrub again" unfortunately **don't** mean you'll never clean the shower again.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- **If you use it daily,** *a spray-and-go shower cleaner is claimed to prevent mould and soap scum build-up and make scrubbing a thing of the past. Some of CHOICE's Home Testers gave them a workout.*
- **Overall, they all worked quite well.** *Even so, about a quarter of the people quit the three-week trial early because they felt their shower needed a good scrub.*
- **Most trialists weren't convinced** *the product was worth splashing out on — read what they said in* The verdict, *below right.*

Is the last person to shower in your house the same each day? If not, can you trust them all to do a quick chore? If not, forget using a spray-and-go shower cleaner — the last person who showers each day has to remember to spray.

The sprays did seem to keep mould growth right down and soap scum to a minimum and, on average, trialists said they would clean less often than normal. So if a daily spraying routine suits your household, it should cut down the time you'll spend scrubbing the shower clean.

But you will almost certainly still be cleaning it. Only one person in the trial thought they'd never need to clean again; others made comments like, "Using this product, it seems, would still require me to clean the shower once a month — I don't see the point of the added cost for purchasing the product and my time to use it." It's possible there might be some truth in "never *scrub* again", though: "Normal cleaning became easier after using the product for three weeks."

You'd probably have to buy a new bottle about once a month (around $4.30 for a 750 mL spray pack, $3.80 for a refill) and, even if it works for the shower, you'll still have to clean the rest of the bathroom with the usual products — as one trialist said, "I would still need to clean the bathtub."

And, as some trialists pointed out, if you can make the time, you can help keep your shower clean by wiping it down with a cloth each day, saving a drain full of chemicals and the added expense.

## THE TRIAL

Forty-five Home Testers living in Queensland and Darwin sprayed their shower daily with a disguised pump-pack of spray, for up to three weeks. We chose high-humidity climates as these are the best conditions for mould growth — less should grow in dry climates. Trialists rated their shower each day for cleanliness, and at the end of the trial scored the product's convenience, fragrance and cleaning effectiveness, and said whether they'd be likely to use it again.

## THE VERDICT

Most trialists thought the fragrances were OK, but in contrast to claims on the packaging of "no scrubbing" or "never scrub again", 11 out of 45 dropped out of the

trial, feeling the shower was just too dirty for them to continue. On average, though, trialists thought their showers stayed "fairly clean" up to 20 days, only looking "a little dirty" right at the end on the 21st day: "The shower remained fairly clean throughout the trial and it was only towards the very end that I felt it needed a scrub."

If you're a fussy cleaner this product may not be for you. People who clean their shower more often tended to be less impressed — eight of the 20 who clean at least once a week quit the trial early, whereas of those who usually clean the shower every two weeks or less often, only three out of 25 did.

Overall, 20 trialists said they were unlikely to use this type of product again, nine that they might use it and 16 that they were likely to. Many trialists commented on small areas of mould growing in grouting and soap scum still forming — notably on glass surfaces. The trialists whose shower walls were all tiles rated the products higher than those who had some glass as well.

Those who liked the products said they were quite convenient to use ("Very convenient — 10 seconds and it's done") and felt they "would have to do normal cleaning less often". Some trialists commented, though, that it didn't save them time, because the few seconds or minutes required for daily spraying added up to about the same amount of time they'd usually spend on a good scrub.

*The three shower sprays on the market: trialists gave them a mixed reception, but agreed almost unanimously that you'd still need to clean your shower, though perhaps less often. If you're keen on a shiny, sparkling-clean look, maybe not much less often at all.*

Some of the reasons trialists gave for why they wouldn't buy this type of product included:

- "As I only clean the shower monthly — not sure expense and time of product would be economical."
- "I would still need to have a good scrub/bleach session each month to six weeks."
- "Sometimes it was just a nuisance — for example, when someone else in the family wanted to take a 'surprise' shower just after I had finished spraying it."
- Impact on the environment (see trialist Karen Martin's comment, below). ■

## CHOICE HOME TESTER

*Home Tester Eva Glenn: "The shower didn't get really dirty, but lost its shiny, sparkling-clean look over the three weeks."*

*Home Tester Karen Martin: "My normal routine (wiping down the shower daily with a squeegee and old nappy) is much 'greener', no chemicals to inhale and probably much cheaper."*

*Home Tester Clair McCarthy: "Overall I think it would take me less time to give it a clean every two to three weeks."*

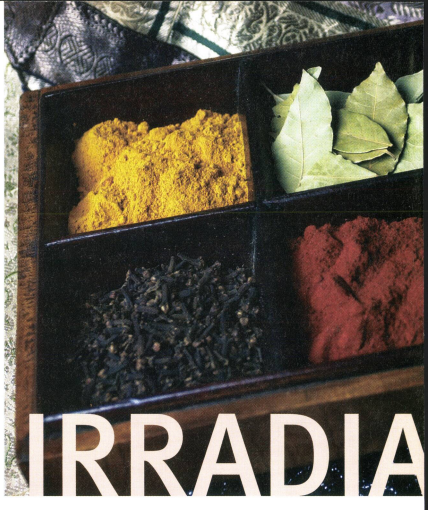
## What's in 'em?

According to the manufacturers, none of the sprays tested contains phosphates and they're all safe for use in septic systems.

Only five trialists reported minor reactions, such as coughing or sneezing, while using the products. None was severe enough to stop them using the sprays.

**PINE O CLEEN Shower Spray & Go** contains benzalkonium chloride, which could cause skin irritation, although nobody reported this problem in our trial. If swallowed, quickly give a few cups of water and seek medical attention.

The manufacturers of **SHOWER SPARKLE pH Neutral** and **WINDEX Shower Clean** said the products' ingredients were confidential commercial information, but both products are registered with the Poisons Information Centre, which you can call from anywhere in Australia on 13 11 26.



Food irradiation's back on the public agenda after the first approval for its use here. Should we be worried? Here are the pros and cons.

# FOOD IRRADIA — no worries? *Not quite...*

## IN A NUTSHELL

- **The pros of irradiation** *are fairly clearcut, whereas the cons are more open-ended: more evidence is needed, or there's just the potential for things to go wrong. But that's no reason to ignore them — look what happened with BSE...*
- **The first approval in Australia** *(see* Foot in the door?, *far right) includes permission to irradiate herbs and spices for decontamination purposes at much higher levels than most other countries; yet at the same time the EU is putting all irradiation plans on hold due to overwhelming community opposition.*

In the eighties food irradiation was a hot topic in Australia. Public opinion at the time was strongly in favour of a ban, and that's what happened: a 10-year ban was placed on it. This was lifted fairly quietly in 1999, and our food regulator, the Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA), has just approved the first application to use it — on herbs, spices and herbal infusions (see *Foot in the door?*, far right).

Judging by the number of submissions that were against approving the application (94% in the first round of public consultation and 99% in the second) it seems there's still concern in the community about the use of food irradiation.

Is this concern justified? We take a look.

## WHAT'S IRRADIATION?

Irradiated food is exposed to ionising radiation: gamma rays from radioactive cobalt are typically used. An electron beam is sometimes used as well.

It doesn't make food radioactive and it's not like microwaves, to which it's often wrongly likened. The powerful, high-frequency radiation penetrates the food, killing bacteria, mould and insects. It can also slow fruit and vegetable ripening and prevent vegetables from sprouting.

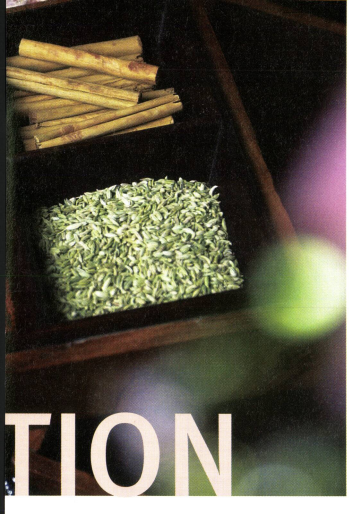
A big drawback is that it doesn't destroy the toxins formed by some bacteria and moulds, so there's a danger that 'cleaning up' contaminated foods with radiation can still leave them unsafe to eat.

## PROS AND CONS

While the pros and cons of irradiation differ depending on the food and the level of irradiation, some generalisation can be made.

### Pros

- It can be an effective way to make food microbiologically safe (it kills bugs).
- It can be used to prolong storage time and shelf-life — as well as leading to less waste, this means the




PHOTOS: RHONDA THWAITE

food can be distributed further, giving remote communities more food choice.

- It can mean less chemical residue in food. It's a more effective way to decontaminate food than existing chemical treatments such as ethylene oxide (which may be carcinogenic), and it's at least as effective at getting rid of insects as methyl bromide (which destroys ozone).
- Food can be irradiated when it's already packaged, so it's less likely to get recontaminated before reaching the consumer.
- It may enhance trade with other countries that permit irradiation (42 allow irradiation of spices and 24 irradiation of herbs).

## Cons

- **Nutrient depletion.** A number of both water- and fat-soluble vitamins (for example, B vitamins and A, C and E), as well as unsaturated fats, are depleted by irradiation. It's thought carbohydrate, protein and saturated fats are relatively unaffected.

## Foot in the door?

In 2000, Steritech (an Australian-owned company in the business of irradiating medical instruments, beehives, wine corks and vet products) applied to our food regulator, ANZFA, to be allowed to irradiate herbs, spices, tea, nuts and oilseeds.

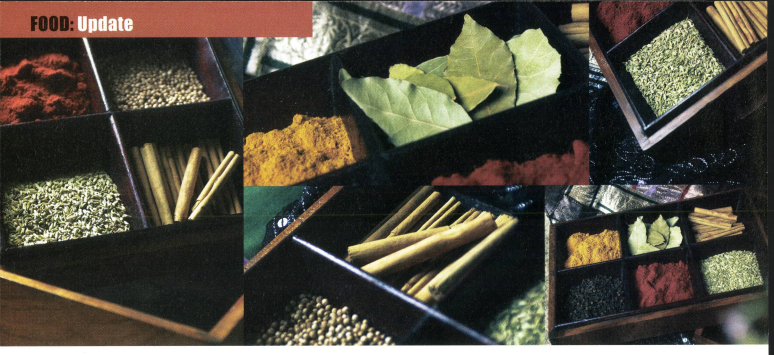
After an initial consultation period ANZFA asked Steritech to supply more information to support the application. At this point Steritech removed oilseeds, black and green tea and all nuts other than peanuts, walnuts, almonds and pistachios from the application. This may have been because oilseeds are a source of vitamin E, tea of antioxidants and nuts of vitamin E and unsaturated fats, all of which are depleted by irradiation.

ANZFA's now approved the irradiation of herbs, spices and herbal infusions (fermented, dried or fresh leaves, flowers or other parts of plants used to make drinks, but not black or green tea) to kill bacteria and insects and control sprouting and weeds. Even though these aren't foods eaten in large quantities, there are a few problems with this approval.

- ANZFA's approved the use of irradiation to decontaminate herbs and spices at a level (30 kilograys) that's out of step with other countries (apart from the US) that allow irradiation, and in the opposite direction to European trends, where the EU is putting all irradiation plans on hold pending further consultation, due to overwhelming community opposition to its use.

The rationale was that this level was needed to cope with heavily contaminated produce. If it's that heavily contaminated, maybe it shouldn't be considered for human consumption in the first place.

- The majority of consumers have said they don't want to buy irradiated food, and overseas experience indicates that labels, though required, don't always find their way onto packages. So you don't always get the choice.
- ANZFA is on the record as being keen to get food irradiation approved as an alternative to chemical fumigation with possibly carcinogenic ethylene oxide. Initially industry was given till September 2001 to stop using it. However, after rushing the irradiation application through, ANZFA's now given industry an additional two years to keep using the chemical too.
- The ministerial council that has the final say over ANZFA's decisions rejected its recommendation to allow irradiation of peanuts, almonds, walnuts and pistachios. The recommendation was questionable: ANZFA argued that nuts aren't a significant source of vitamin E and unsaturated fats for the Australian population, even for vegetarians, so the depletion of these nutrients wouldn't be a problem. But people are constantly encouraged to replace the saturated fat in their diet with unsaturated, which nuts generally contain, along with vitamin E. It doesn't seem sensible to reduce the potential benefits of eating more of them.



*The radura is used internationally to identify irradiated food — a helpful guide for shoppers.*

However, the losses are similar to those in other food processing techniques, such as drying and heating (as in canning). But as with any process, the important consideration should be whether the cumulative effect of all these processes is likely to have a serious effect on some people.

While nutrient losses aren't a problem in irradiated herbs and spices — you don't eat much and they're not a major source anyway — it would become a concern if foods that are a rich source of any of the nutrients that are depleted by the process were allowed to be irradiated.

The flavour of foods can also sometimes change or be reduced.

**Irradiation might be used as a clean-up technique.** Despite all good intentions, it would be tempting for some manufacturers to use sloppy practices and not bother to stick to food safety programs, and then zap the food at the end to clean it up.

Food crawling with bacteria is no more appealing made 'safe' by a dose of irradiation. And in Europe there have been attempts to clean up food unfit for human consumption by irradiating it. At least one report has appeared of seafood brokers using irradiation to reduce bacterial contamination in batches which, in some cases, had already been rejected by public health agencies as unfit for human consumption.

And, as noted, irradiation doesn't kill the toxins some bacteria produce anyway.

**Toxicological concerns.** When food is irradiated a large number of compounds, known as radiolytic products, are formed. Our food regulator has dismissed concerns about these substances, saying all reliable scientific evidence indicates there's no risk to humans. However, in its report ANZFA cited only four human studies, all of which were short-term — arguably not enough to give definitive evidence that irradiation poses no risk to us. There's a concern that any subtle chemical effects of irradiation won't show up for years.

**Irradiated food not labelled clearly.** Irradiated food must be labelled, but some of the labelling options aren't as simple as they could be ('treated with ionising radiation', 'treated with ionising electrons', for example). What's wrong with 'irradiated food'? Also, if an ingredient in a food, as opposed to the whole food, is irradiated, there need only be a statement next to that ingredient in the ingredients list. This could go unnoticed. A clearly identifiable symbol (the radura, left, is the symbol used internationally) on the front of the package would be more useful for people who want to choose non-irradiated food.

And who's going to monitor the labelling of irradiated food; already well-stretched health departments?

**Environmental and occupational health concerns.** It uses nuclear reaction by-products, and because of its hazardous nature, irradiation can only be carried out in special plants. Any accidents could have serious consequences for workers and the environment.

## CHOICE'S VIEW

The irradiation of food and ingredients should only be allowed if other methods of preventing contamination or enabling decontamination can't be applied in a reasonable way. It shouldn't be used as a substitute for good hygiene practices or to try to restore products already unfit for consumption.

ANZFA needs to examine all applications to irradiate food very carefully. CHOICE has a number of concerns about its decisions on the first application (see *Foot in the door*, page 25) and hopes it applies more rigorous criteria to any future applications. ANZFA's currently looking at an application to irradiate tropical fruits to control pests — we'll be keeping a close eye on this. ■

# Inkjet REFILLS

VANESSA MARSHALL

## Cheaper than brand-name cartridges, simple — what's the catch?

If you have an inkjet printer, you're likely to have had a shock over the price of your recommended replacement cartridges: for some cheaper printers, the cost of the cartridge can be over half what you paid for the printer.

Most cartridges aren't designed to be refillable, so when your old one runs out your only option is to get a new one and throw the old one out — into landfill. If you have to replace your cartridge several times a year, the dollars add up quickly.

It's possible to get so-called 'compatible' cartridges for many printers, produced by a third-party company, and some cartridges can even be refilled, using kits with syringes and ink. Are they any good?

### Pros and cons

Like any cheaper alternative, there are trade-offs. If you're not especially concerned about the print quality and your printer is out of warranty, refills have definite advantages:

- Reduced landfill from printer cartridges.
- Cheaper than buying new cartridges.

But there are cons:

- Inkjet refill kits are messy.
- Ink quality may be lower, or more variable.
- Differences in chemical make-up may have unexpected effects — high-viscosity inks may clog your printer heads, for example — or even damage your printer.
- You'll probably have to pay repair charges for any damage caused as a direct result of using a refilled or compatible cartridge, even if your printer is under warranty.

### Warranty problems?

We spoke to Epson, Hewlett-Packard, Canon and Lexmark about refills and how they might affect your current printer warranty. They all said they recommend the use of genuine cartridges with their printers, but that the printer warranty wouldn't be affected by the use of refills or compatibles unless the damage was directly caused by the use of a non-genuine cartridge. Even then, each claim would be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and the manufacturer would need to demonstrate that the third-party product was the cause of the damage.

Lexmark has an additional warranty on all its cartridges, which it won't honour if the cartridge has been refilled. Similarly, Canon has a 25-year guarantee that the ink will be light-fast — as long as you use Canon ink and paper.

Additionally, printer manufacturers generally don't have any influence over or approval of the specs or results from cartridges labelled 'compatible', so if you have a problem or damage your printer as a result of using one, the only recourse is to the inkjet cartridge maker.

### Want to do it?

If you decide to take the plunge, you'll need to check first whether there are any compatible cartridges for your printer model. They're stocked by most computer stores and stationery departments, and you can check online via a search engine using your brand, model and 'inkjet refill' or 'inkjet cartridge' as keywords. Remember to check currency exchange rates if you're looking at overseas sites.

If cartridges are available, check how much ink is in them; you may get different volumes from different compatible cartridge brands.

When you give them a test run, watch the print quality and decide if it's acceptable for your requirements.

If there are no compatible cartridges, you may still be able to get a refill kit, which means you add the ink to your old cartridge, which can be messy. Some cartridges aren't easily refillable — if there isn't a kit for your cartridge type, it probably means that it isn't suitable for refilling. ■

### IN A NUTSHELL

**'Compatible'** *cartridges and refills are certainly cheaper, but they're not problem-free.*

### Looking after your printer

**Whether you've decided to use refills or not, you can cut your printer cartridge costs and get better results from your printer.**

- **A black cartridge is usually cheaper than colour cartridges, so if you can, only print in black.**
- **Print in 'draft' mode when you can.**
- **If you print out Web pages, switch off the images and colour and choose a printer-friendly version, where possible.**
- **Clean your print heads regularly — most printer control programs can handle this for you.**

# High-octane PETROL

Better performance! Improved fuel efficiency! Will high-octane petrol really do this for *your* car?

PHOTOS: MARCUS MARSHALL

## IN A NUTSHELL

**High-octane fuels** *may improve your car's performance and fuel efficiency, but are also more expensive, so the increased fuel efficiency isn't likely to save you money.*

While filling your car you may have come across names such as **BP Ultimate, MOBIL Synergy 8000** or **SHELL Optimax** — high-octane fuels claiming a number of benefits, such as:

- **High octane rating** (RON=98; see *Octane numbers*, below), promising more engine power and less knock.
- **Higher density** for lower fuel consumption.
- **Added detergents** that keep engine parts clean, providing smoother engine performance and lower fuel consumption.

## WHAT'S KNOCK?

'Knock' is the sound caused if fuel isn't burned smoothly in a car's engine. In ideal conditions, the spark plug creates a flame that travels across the cylinder, burning the fuel/air mix and steadily building up pressure. If part of the fuel/air mix instantaneously self-ignites before the flame reaches it, the pressure rises rapidly, causing a knocking or pinging noise. Heavy knocking can cause engine damage.

Knocking is influenced by several factors — for example, the build-up of deposits, hard acceleration in too high a gear, high-load driving (uphill or towing) and an out-of-tune engine (wrong spark timing or fuel/air ratio) can all lead to increased knocking.

## OCTANE NUMBERS

A fuel's octane number is a measure of its ability to resist self-ignition when burnt in an engine — its anti-knock quality.

The octane number is measured under standardised test conditions against reference fuels, one of which is iso-octane (hence the name 'octane' number). In fact a fuel has several octane numbers, depending on the test conditions. Car fuels are described by two numbers: research octane (RON) and motor octane number (MON), with the RON being higher than the MON.

Typical RON values are:

- Regular unleaded petrol: 91.
- Premium unleaded petrol: 95.
- Lead replacement petrol: 96.
- High-octane petrol: 98.

Each engine requires a certain octane number to prevent knocking — for example, your car may need premium unleaded rather than regular unleaded petrol. This requirement is measured under worst-case conditions, and takes into account a slight increase over time — for example, due to the build-up of deposits. In less severe conditions, the engine can do with petrol of a lower-octane number. Apart from being less likely to develop knocking, an engine won't benefit from using a higher-octane petrol than it requires (for example, it won't provide more power).

While high-octane fuels are suitable for all cars (except some pre-1986 models that would also require an additive), not all models can take full advantage of them.

## MORE POWER?

According to the oil companies' claims, some cars can produce more power by using high-octane fuels. And while engines designed for lower-octane petrol won't provide more power using high-octane petrol, they may be less likely to develop knocking.

The high octane rating may benefit your car in one of the following situations:

- You have a high-performance (especially turbo-charged) car designed for high-octane fuel.
- Your car has a sophisticated knock sensor (currently found on some high-performance and luxury models) that — depending on the octane rating of the petrol you're using — actively tunes your engine (for example, spark plug timing) to the maximum possible setting just before it starts to sense knock. It can therefore take advantage of the higher octane rating and actually increase the power output of your car.
- You've noticed a decrease in your car's power. This may have been caused by a passive knock sensor found on most modern car models. This type of sensor doesn't kick in unless it detects knocking. It then tunes down the car's engine (for example, the spark plug timing), reducing the tendency to knock — but also the power output. Using a fuel with a higher octane rating can prevent that, so the engine can work on its normal power output: if you're using regular unleaded, you may want to try premium unleaded instead. If you're already using premium unleaded, one of the high-octane products may improve things.
- Your car's engine knocks when using regular unleaded, premium unleaded or lead replacement petrol. Again, try upgrading to the next level of petrol.
- You have a classic car originally designed for 98 RON petrol, but which was retuned to be able to use lower-octane fuel — resulting in decreased performance. If you decide to use one of the high-octane fuels all the time, you can tune the engine back to the original settings and original performance.

## BETTER FUEL EFFICIENCY?

Two factors contribute to better fuel efficience: fuel density and a cleaner fuel system.

- The oil companies claim high-octane fuels are about 3–5% **denser** than regular unleaded petrol (meaning you get more energy per litre), potentially decreasing your car's fuel consumption by up to that amount.
- As your car gets older, and particularly if you've been using petrol without an added **detergent**, deposits may build up in its fuel system, injector nozzles, valves and combustion chamber. This can lead to increased engine knock, less responsive running and lower fuel efficiency.

A cleaner fuel system leads to better engine response and fuel efficiency. All the companies offering a high-octane fuel add detergents to their regular unleaded products, but they claim the detergents in high-octane products are either of better quality, cleaning engine parts not cleaned by regular detergents, and/or are added in a higher concentration, not only preventing build-up, but also cleaning up existing deposits after a few tankfuls.

(**CALTEX** doesn't have a high-octane fuel, but a 95 RON premium unleaded product called **Vortex** that contains detergents, also claiming the above benefits.)

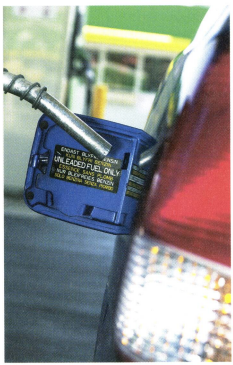
If you have a problem with deposit build-up, using a detergent additive available from your petrol station may be an alternative.

By how much, if at all, a high-octane fuel can improve your car's fuel efficiency depends on a number of factors — for example, on what type of petrol you've been using before, or on the degree of deposit built-up in your engine. And as everyday driving conditions (and therefore fuel consumption) can vary considerably, it may be quite difficult to reliably identify any improvement. Plus high-octane fuels are usually around 8-10 cents per litre more expensive than regular unleaded, so the lower fuel consumption is unlikely to save you money. ■

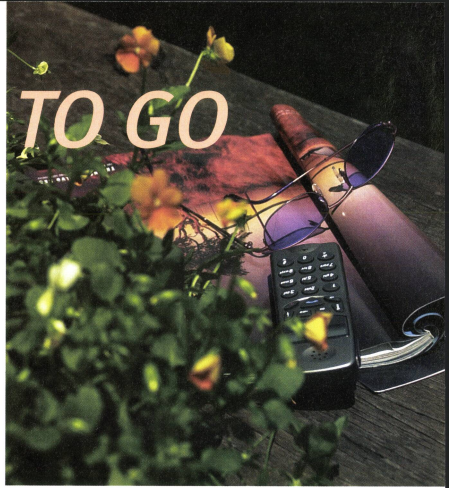
### ENVIRONMENT

*BP Ultimate may appeal to you if you want to reduce your car's environmental impact. It's linked to the* Global Choice *program, which offsets your car's greenhouse gas emissions by investing in greenhouse gas reduction programs (go to www.bp.com.au/globalchoice, or call 1300 130 027 for details).*

***Some cars may be an exception, but as higher-octane petrol is more expensive, it's unlikely to save you money even if it does slightly decrease fuel consumption.***



# PHONES TO GO



Whether you want a basic phone or one with many features, there's one in our test for you.

## IN A NUTSHELL

- **Most models** *performed well. There are lots of features and options, so buy according to your needs — see* What to look for, *page 32.*
- **Some models** *have quite limited talk times. If this is particularly important to you, check the table to see which lasted longest.*
- **Digital models** *offer better security from eavesdropping.*

## WHAT'S ON TEST

We tested six analogue and five digital cordless phones. We chose the cheapest models in each category, with an upper limit of $300 (when we purchased) for the digital models.

## WHAT TO BUY

| | |
|---|---|
| **DIGITAL PHONES** | |
| **UNIDEN DECT 1811*** | $229 |
| **UNIDEN D571** | $199 |
| **PANASONIC KX-TC1851ALB** | $317 |
| * *See* What's DECT?, *page 32.* | |
| **ANALOGUE PHONES** | |
| **AUDIOLINE FF788** | $90 |
| **OMNI CT300** | $89 |
| **UNIDEN XS610** | $99 |
| **TELSTRA FREEDOM 70** | $99 |

All these models are good phones — base your choice on the features you want (see the profiles, right, and the table, page 32), or just go for a good price.

Convenience is the big benefit of a cordless phone, but if that's not enough, there's a whole stack of extra features you can add on. Most of the phones in our test are the base models in a range that includes phones with an answer machine attached and models with a dial pad and speakerphone on the base. With those, you can make calls from the base or handset. When used together, they act as an intercom.

On more expensive models, you'll find displays with caller ID, the ability to memorise and redial the last few incoming calls, or permanently store numbers in the memory.

## DIGITAL VS ANALOGUE

Digital phones exchange the voice signal with the base station in a digital code. They're more secure from eavesdropping (so particularly useful if you make credit card purchases by phone) and are claimed to give a clearer sound without background noise.

The digital signal passes through walls more easily, which gives a better range inside buildings. Some types have long-range capabilities outside, though this requires a relatively unobstructed path for the signal.

The main disadvantage of digital phones is their high price. Basic digital models start from around $180, analogue from around $80.

## CHAT TIME

You'll want a phone that doesn't run out of battery power too soon. In our test, most gave eight or more hours of talk time. The exceptions were the **DSE F7023** (5.5 hours), the **OMNI CT300** (seven hours), the **PANASONIC KX-TC1851ALB** (six hours), and the **UNIDEN DS71** (6.5 hours). You might find the shorter times a bit frustrating.

In standby mode, most models lasted for days. We stopped counting after a fortnight with seven of the models. However, the **DORO DECT 160** (3.5 days) and the **TELSTRA Freedom 70** (four days) might not have enough standby endurance for some people.

# Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order within groups, from left to right. Prices shown are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in October 2001.

## DIGITAL PHONES

### UNIDEN DECT 1811

*Price:* $229

GOOD POINTS

- Very good speech quality.
- Good range from inside buildings.
- Generally easy to use.
- Secure conversations.
- Caller ID.
- Digital display.
- Supports up to five handsets from its base.
- NiMH battery (see note 12, page 33).

BAD POINTS

- Range in open conditions is low for a digital phone, though typical of DECT models (see page 32).
- Not wall-mountable.

### UNIDEN DS71

*Price:* $199

GOOD POINTS

- Best for line clarity, equal best for low line noise.
- Secure conversations.
- Good range from inside buildings.
- The longest outside range in the test.
- Generally easy to use.
- Low price for a digital phone.
- NiMH battery.

BAD POINTS

- Shorter talk time (see the table, page 32).
- Outside range is short of the maker's claim.
- Quietest ring tone in the test.

### PANASONIC KX-TC1851ALB

*Price:* $317

GOOD POINTS

- Very good speech transmission.
- Good range from inside buildings.
- Short recharge time.
- Generally easy to use.
- Secure conversations.
- Caller ID.
- Digital display.

BAD POINTS

- Shorter talk time.

## ANALOGUE PHONES

### AUDIOLINE FF788

*Price:* $90

GOOD POINTS

- Very good battery life in both standby and talk modes.
- NiMH battery.
- Top analogue model for performance (see note 2, page 33, for what this includes).
- Generally easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Channel change button is hard to find when talking.
- Conversations aren't secure.

### OMNI CT300

*Price:* $89

GOOD POINTS

- Very good speech quality.
- Generally easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Shorter talk time.
- Wide handset is uncomfortable to grip.
- No letters on keypad for alphabetic dialling.
- Not hearing aid compatible.
- Conversations aren't secure.

### UNIDEN XS610

*Price:* $99

GOOD POINTS

- Very good speech quality.
- Comfortable handset, and the number pad is very easy to read and use.
- Generally easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Conversations aren't secure.

### TELSTRA FREEDOM 70

*Price:* $99

GOOD POINTS

- Very good speech quality.
- Very easy to change channels.
- NiMH battery.
- Very easy to clean.

BAD POINTS

- Short standby battery life.
- Conversations aren't secure.

## WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

Of the other analogue phones, the **PANASONIC KX-TC1005ALW** didn't score as well for performance as the recommended models (see note 2, page 33), though it has the loudest ring tone. The **DSE F7023 10-channel** is the hardest to use, has the shortest talk time and among the shorter standby times.

The remaining digital models, the **DORO DECT 160** and **LG GT-8110**, are worth considering if you find them at a good price, but neither has any outstanding performance attributes.

| Brand / model (in rank order within groups) | PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%) | 2 Performance score (%) | 3 Ease of use score (%) | 4 Talk time (hours) | 5 Standby time (days) | 6 Recharge time (hours) | 7 Range outside (m) | 8 Range inside (m) | 9 Ring loudness (max, dB) | 10 FEATURES Wall-mountable | Pag |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DIGITAL | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **UNIDEN** DECT 1811 | 87 | 88 | 85 | 15.0 | 14+ | 13.0 | 350 | 95 | 69 | | ✓ |
| **UNIDEN** D571 **(A)** | 85 | 86 | 83 | 6.5 | 14+ | 12.5 | 650 | 95 | 63 | ✓ | ✓ |
| **PANASONIC** KX-TC1851ALB | 84 | 82 | 89 | 6.0 | 14+ | 6.5 | 500 | 100 | 76 | ✓ | ✓ |
| **LG** GT-8110 | 79 | 77 | 81 | 7.5 | 12.5 | 10.0 | 500 | 90 | 68 | ✓ | ✓ |
| **DORO** DECT 160 | 75 | 71 | 83 | 8.0 | 3.5 | 9.0 | 250 | 100 | 69 | | ✓ |
| ANALOGUE | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **AUDIOLINE** FF788 | 80 | 82 | 74 | 15.0 | 14+ | 21.5 | 500 | 40 | 77 **(B)** | ✓ **(C)** | ✓ |
| **OMNI** CT300 | 80 | 79 | 83 | 7.0 | 14+ | 14.5 | 500 | 40 | 67 **(B)** | | ✓ |
| **UNIDEN** XS610 | 78 | 75 | 85 | 9.0 | 14+ | 13.0 | 500 | 35 | 69 | ✓ | ✓ |
| **TELSTRA** Freedom 70 | 77 | 74 | 84 | 11.5 | 4 | 14.0 | 500 | 35 | 65 | ✓ | ✓ |
| **DSE** F7023 10-channel | 75 | 78 | 69 | 5.5 | 10.5 | 13.0 | 500 | 60 | 64 | ✓ | ✓ |
| **PANASONIC** KX-TC1005ALW | 72 | 67 | 83 | 10.5 | 14+ | 14.5 | 500 | 35 | 87 | ✓ | ✓ |

## UP THE GARDEN PATH

Because they're low-powered, there are limits to how far you can take your cordless phone away from its base, especially if there are solid walls, trees or even fences in the way. Some types of digital phone can be taken further than analogues, but be wary of claims for really big distances such as a kilometre or more. These are generally based on ideal conditions with no obstructions. Our tests show a combination of typical suburban obstructions can reduce the range to under 30 metres for all phones.

None of the digital phones in this test offers very long range. The **UNIDEN DS71** was the best: 650 metres in unobstructed conditions. That said, all the phones tested this time are likely to be adequate for normal suburban use. If you're contending with a lot of walls, a digital phone will cope best.

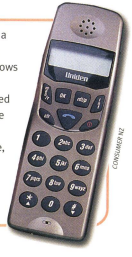
## CLEAR AS A BELL?

Digital phones are said to give clearer sound, without line noise. The best of the digital models did sound clear, but the better analogue models (the **OMNI CT300**, **AUDIOLINE FF788**, **UNIDEN XS610** and **TELSTRA Freedom 70**) were very close to the same quality. The digital **DORO DECT 160** and **LG GT-8110** couldn't match the best analogue models, and the analogue **PANASONIC KX-TC1005ALW** suffered noticeably from line noise.

## What's DECT?

Digital enhanced cordless technology (DECT) phones are a type of digital phone, but are focused more on providing versatile features than extended range. A DECT phone allows you to have several handsets registered to a single base station and to transfer calls between handsets. If you need more than one line connected at a time, you can have the handsets registered to more than one base.

However, the more phones and base stations you have, the more it costs, and DECT phones aren't cheap. Their long-distance range isn't as good in all conditions as that of some other digital phones either. DECT's probably best suited to small businesses or large families.




## What to look for

Before buying a cordless phone, work out what you need.

- A phone that has a dial pad and speaker on the base allows you to make calls from the base when the handset is out in the garden, say. This type of phone usually acts as an intercom as well.
- If you want to make calls from as far as one kilometre from home base, a digital phone may be the answer. But even digital phones have limited range compared to mobiles. Check the phone has an out-of-range warning.
- Get a digital model for its secure voice transmission if you regularly use your phone to make credit card transactions.
- Anything you connect to your phone line draws from the line's capacity. The amount drawn is the ringer equivalent number (REN), which is usually printed on the bottom of the appliance. Generally, phone lines have a maximum REN capacity of 3. If the sum of the RENs of all the appliances you've connected to your line exceeds this, they may not work properly — for example, your phone may not ring. Check the REN you're already using before buying. You may have to shop for a low-REN cordless phone to stay under your limit.
- Most cordless phone bases rely on mains power. Have an additional ordinary phone in case of power failure.
- If you want to talk to other people on your property or switch calls between handsets, a DECT phone with multiple handsets could be useful (see *What's DECT?*, left, for more).
- Check the phone has enough talk and standby time for your needs (there'll be claims on the packaging).
- Choose a multi-channel model so you can change

| Itiple ndsets pported | Speech volume control | Encrypted voice transmission | Out-of-range warning | Battery low warning | Hearing aid compatible | SPECIFICATIONS 11 REN | 12 Battery type | Origin | Warranty (years) | Manufacturer / distributor | Price ($)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | NiMH | Korea | 1 | Uniden | 229 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 0.5 | NiMH | Korea | 1 | Uniden | 199 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 0.2 | NiCad | Malaysia | 1 | Panasonic | 317 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 0.51 | NiCad | Thailand | 1 | LG Electronics | 180 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 0.5 | NiMH | China | 1 | Doro | 229 |
| | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | 0.5 | NiMH | China | 1 | Doro | 90 |
| | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | 1 | NiCad | China | 1 | Sibercom | 89 |
| | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | NiCad | China | 1 | Uniden | 99 |
| | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 0.5 | NiMH | China | 1 | Tech Pacific | 99 |
| | | | | ✓ | ✓ | 0.5 | NiCad | China | 1 | Dick Smith Electronics | 80 |
| | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | 0.1 | NiCad | Malaysia | 1 | Panasonic | 135 |

* *Prices shown are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in October 2001*

(A) *The model has been discontinued, but may still be available in shops.*

(B) *Ring volume isn't adjustable.*

(C) *An accessory bracket must be purchased from the retailer or the distributor.*

channels in case of interference (see *Features all the tested models have*, below).

- Check for compatibility with hearing aids.
- Do you want a built-in answerphone? If not, check whether the phone supports a message service. Does it have a message indicator?
- Look for clearly labelled large keys with backlighting if you'll need to use the phone in poor light.
- Try the handset to ensure it's not too heavy, is comfortable to hold and fits well to your face.

## FEATURES ALL THE TESTED MODELS HAVE

- Seven or more channels.
- Autoscan, which picks the best channel when you answer a call. All have either a manual channel-change button or an automatic feature that changes channel whenever interference is a problem.
- Redial function for the last number called.
- A # (hash) key, which may be needed for automated telephone services.
- Auto standby and auto talk. If the handset is in the base station and you receive a call, you can pick up the handset and start talking immediately. To hang up, either press the talk button or put the phone back on the base.
- Low battery warning — either a dedicated light or the talk button flashes.
- Security codes, so others can't use your base station to run up big bills.
- A pager feature. Press a button on the base station and the handset beeps. This might be quite useful if you put the phone down and forget where.

### 1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%).

### 2 Performance score

The performance score is a combination of the following measurements and user panel assessments:

- Range (inside and outside): 40%.
- Talk time: 10%.
- Standby time: 10%.
- Speech clarity: 10%
- Speech loudness: 10%.
- Line noise: 10%.
- Background noise reduction: 10%.

### 3 Ease of use score

A panel of three people assessed the following (all weighted equally):

- Clarity and completeness of the instruction manual.
- Layout of keys and controls.
- Readability of the numbers and labels.
- Feel and comfort of the handset.
- Ease of changing channels.
- Ease of cleaning the phone.

### 4 Talk time

The number of hours the phone battery lasted in talk mode, rounded down to the nearest half-hour.

### 5 Standby time

Most models lasted well on standby — we stopped counting after a fortnight with seven models — but it's a weak point for the **TELSTRA Freedom 70** and **DORO DECT 160**.

### 6 Recharge time

The time taken to recharge rounded down to the nearest half-hour.

### 7 Range outside a house

The base station was set up with a relatively unobstructed path outside. The distance was measured at which voice transmission could just be heard and a dial tone was received.

### 8 Range from inside a house

The range through walls was measured as above to check the effect of obstructions. The results are just for comparison, as different wall materials will affect performance.

### 9 Ring loudness (maximum)

Measured at 1 m from the handset while it wasn't on the base.

### 10 Features

See *What to look for* and *Features all the tested models have* (left) for an explanation of these features.

### 11 REN: Ringer equivalent number

The phone line limit is normally a total of 3 REN for all connected devices (see *What to look for* for more on this).

### 12 Battery type

Nickel metal hydride (NiMH) cells are considered less prone to memory effects than nickel-cadmium (NiCad), and don't contain toxic materials, making disposal of them easier.

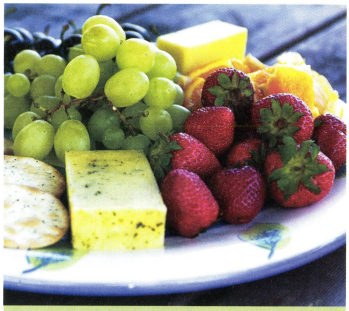
## Did you know ...

To put on weight, you might think you have to eat a lot more food than your body needs. In fact one small chocolate bar a week above what your body needs could increase your weight by 3.5 kg in a year.

What to do? A combination of eating less and moving more — regular exercise can increase your metabolic rate for up to two days after you do it, so you burn more calories just sitting around.

## TIP: SAFE LUNCHBOXES

It's back-to-school time, and to stop the bacteria having a field day in the lunchbox, put in a frozen drink bottle wrapped in plastic. It'll keep the sandwiches colder and at least slow down bacterial growth, and will have thawed by the time they want to drink it. Or you could choose not to give the kids high-risk fillings like roast meats, ham or chicken in the warmer months.



## Is 'food combining' claptrap?

Have you come across diets saying you should only eat foods in certain combinations? The right combinations are supposed to lead to better digestion and a higher level of health. The 'wrong' ones — such as carbohydrate and protein foods in the same meal — are said to create toxins that make you gain weight. The result is a complicated set of diet rules.

Don't get sucked in by the scientific-sounding explanations and the apparently horrible consequences — there's no good scientific evidence to support these theories. Your body can digest combinations of foods without any problems.

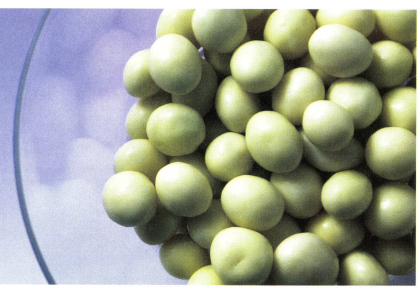
If you lose weight following one of these diets, it'll be because you're pretty restricted in what you can eat and when, not because the theory is right.

## WHERE'S THE YOGHURT?

We all know yoghurt's generally a healthy food, so dried fruit covered in yoghurt sounds even better, right?

Well, maybe, if what you're eating is actually yoghurt. Unfortunately, too often what you get is a concoction of fat (usually saturated), sugar and yoghurt powder or milk solids, masquerading as yoghurt.

And it's not only dried fruit to look out for: many so-called health bars and muesli bars claim to be coated in 'yoghurt' as well. Check the ingredients list to be sure what's really in them.

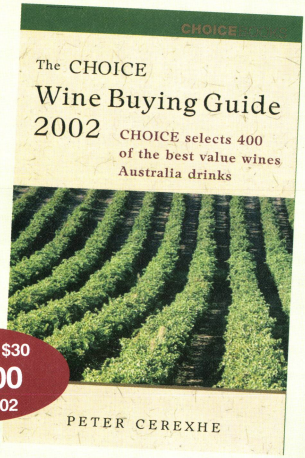


PHOTOS: VANESSA MARSHALL

CHOICE BOOKS

*We know you love our regular December wine tests, so we've now chosen 400 red, white and sparkling wines for our new 232-page book*

# The CHOICE Wine Buying Guide 2002




**Why this guide is unique ...**

- Each of the wines selected is a bestseller and widely available across Australia.
- The majority of the prices range from $5 to $25.
- 14 well-respected winemakers, retailers and consultants assessed the wines; at least four tasted each wine.
- Wine tasting was 'blind'.
- CHOICE purchased each bottle; no-one influenced decisions.

**You can also discover ...**

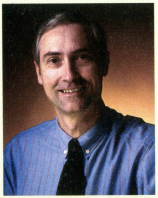
- What a label tells you.
- How to store wine.
- What can go wrong with wine.
- How to match wine with food.
- Australia's wine regions (including maps).
- The health benefits of wine.

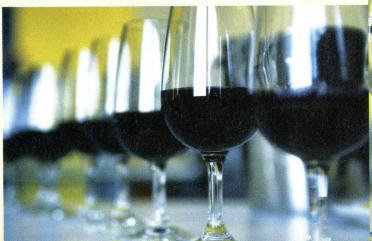
**Normally $30**
**$27.00**
**till 28/2/02**

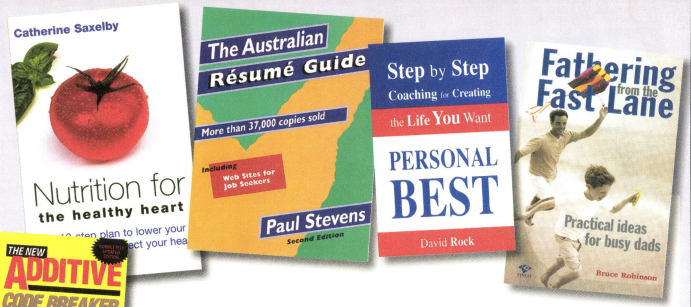
**Code: WINE**

**A special offer to CHOICE subscribers only — until February 28, 2002, you'll receive a 10% discount. Buy this great book for just $27.**

Peter Cerexhe is a full-time writer and editor with a love of wine. He worked with winemakers and expert tasters for a number of years during CHOICE wine tests, and from them gained considerable insight and inspiration. He edits two magazines and has written three books, including *Before and After Retirement* for CHOICE Books.





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## THE NEW ADDITIVE CODEBREAKER

Find out what the codes on the labels of your food mean.
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The advice you need when applying for a job.
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A 12-week 'life-coaching' program that will help you get to where you want to go.
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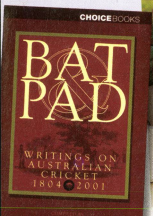
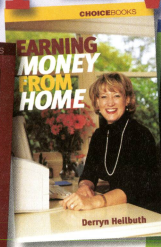
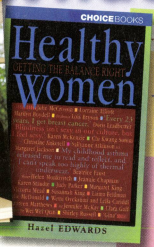
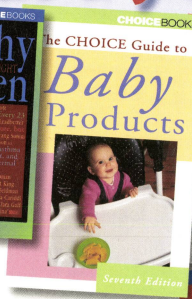
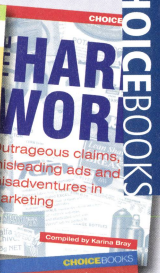
# 2001 — What a year!

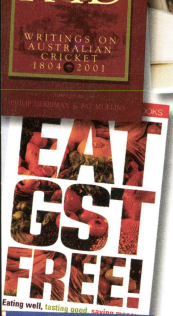


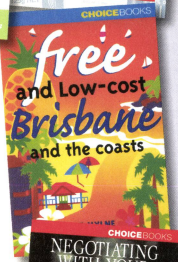



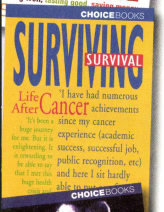



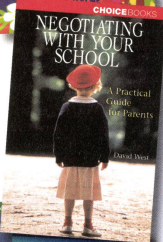



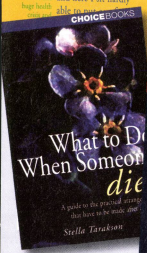



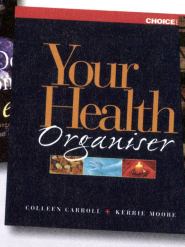



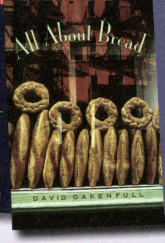



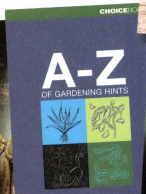



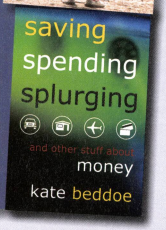

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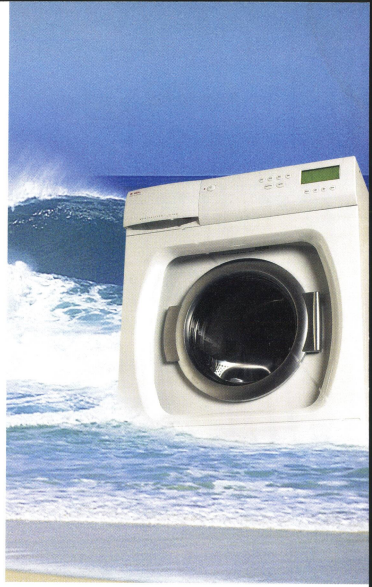
# UPDATE: Washing machines

Here are our best-performing and best-value washing machines for 2001.



## MORE INFORMATION

**For what to look for in a washing machine**, *see CHOICE, March 2001, or go to our website: www.choice.com.au (click on* Washing machines *in 'Top 10 reports'). If you don't have a copy of the March issue or Web access, send a stamped (85 cents in NSW, 95 cents elsewhere), self-addressed A5 or larger envelope to Washing machines, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, and we'll send you a photocopy.*

We tested more than 20 washing machines over the course of the last year, including seven new ones since our last report (CHOICE, September 2001). The models in the *What to buy* list are our recommendations from all the year's testing, selected on the basis of top performance and/or low combined purchase and running costs.

## Brand reliability

We asked subscribers to tell us whether their washing machine had needed repair in the previous 12 months and whether they'd buy the same brand again. Overall, 16% of machines had needed repair, with the range of reliability (the percentage that hadn't needed repair) being 71%–93% across all the brands reported on.

The brands in our *What to buy* list got the following results:

- 84% of **ASKO** machines hadn't needed repair (out of 698 reported on) and 93% of respondents said they'd buy the brand again.
- 90% of **KLEENMAID** machines hadn't needed repair (out of 1317 reported on) and 91% said they'd buy the brand again.
- 84% of **SIMPSON** machines hadn't needed repair (out of 3437 reported on) and 84% said they'd buy the brand again.
- 83% of **FISHER & PAYKEL** machines hadn't needed repair (out of 6564) and 94% said they'd buy the brand again.
- 81% of **HOOVER** machines hadn't needed repair (out of 4341 reported on) and 85% said they'd buy the brand again.

Unfortunately we didn't get enough responses for **AEG** and **BOSCH** washing machines to report on them.

## WHAT TO BUY

| | |
|---|---|
| **Small (up to 5.5 kg)** | |
| **ASKO Quattro W640** (fr) | $1949 |
| **KLEENMAID BY BRANDT TX 768A** (t/dr) | $1999 |
| **SIMPSON Enviro 100 45S100C** (fr) BEST BUY | $899 |
| **BOSCH WFB4001** (fr) | $1399 |
| **SIMPSON Esprit 550 36S550K** (tp) BEST BUY | $599 |
| **Medium (6 to 7 kg)** | |
| **AEG Lavamat W830-W** (fr) | $1449 |
| **FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW710** (tp) | $1222 |
| **HOOVER Boss 600MB** (tp) BEST BUY | $899 |
| **Large (7.5 kg or more)** | |
| **FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW810** (tp) BEST BUY | $1356 |

fr = front loader tp = top loader
t/dr = top loader with front-loader-style drum

A **Best Buy** indicates that a model is a reasonable performer in its size bracket and its combined purchase and running costs are comparatively low. The other models in the *What to buy* list are the overall top performers in their size bracket out of all the models in the table, but they'll cost more to buy and/or run than the Best Buys.

# Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order from top to bottom within their size brackets. Prices shown are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in September 2001. You can probably get a better price by shopping around.

## SMALL (up to 5.5 kg)

### ASKO QUATTRO W640

*Price:* $1949

FRONT LOADER

This top-scoring machine performed well in all tests and, thanks to its very good energy and water efficiency, has low running costs. It has lots of useful features so it's worth storing the manual close to the machine for quick reference.

### BOSCH WFB4001

Price: $1399

FRONT LOADER

Good overall performance, low running costs and one of the best energy efficiency scores. The door opening is small compared to other front loaders, making loading and unloading more difficult.

### KLEENMAID BY BRANDT TX 768A

*Price:* $1999

TOP LOADER WITH FRONT-LOADER-STYLE DRUM

This machine performed well in all tests and, thanks to its very good energy and water efficiency, has the lowest running costs. It's compact in size and has castors for easy moving, making it ideal for smaller homes. On the downside, the opening is quite small, so it's comparatively difficult to load and unload clothes.

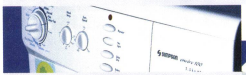
### SIMPSON ESPRIT 550 36S550K

*Price:* $599

BEST BUY

TOP LOADER

We've included this model for those who want a small, conventional-style top loader. While it didn't score as well as other washing machines in this size range and it's not the gentlest on clothes, it's among the better machines for dirt removal. It scored the same overall but is better value than the other top loader in this size bracket, the **FISHER & PAYKEL Smart Drive Pride MW059**.



### SIMPSON ENVIRO 100 45S100C

*Price:* $899

BEST BUY

FRONT LOADER

This machine scored well across the board and has a relatively short cycle time for a front loader. The window in the door protrudes across the opening, which makes access more restrictive than in some of the other machines. Its fairly low running costs combined with its purchase price make it a Best Buy in this size bracket.

## LARGE (7.5 kg or more)

### FISHER & PAYKEL INTUITIVE ECO IW810

*Price:* $1356

BEST BUY

TOP LOADER

Top performer in its size bracket, the best conventional top loader on test and also — thanks to its relatively low running costs — a Best Buy. It has a very good energy efficiency score (the best among the top loaders). However, it's not the gentlest on clothes.

## MEDIUM (6 to 7 kg)

### AEG LAVAMAT W830-W

*Price:* $1449

FRONT LOADER

Larger than most other front loaders, this machine scored reasonably well across the board, and is among the best for water and energy efficiency. Its dirt removal score is one of the lowest overall, but is still good. However, it's the slowest machine, taking two hours to complete a normal cycle.

### FISHER & PAYKEL INTUITIVE ECO IW710

*Price:* $1222

TOP LOADER

Very good energy efficiency for a top loader, and the best dirt removal score of the machines on test. However, it's not the gentlest on clothes, and it occasionally went so out of balance that we had to manually redistribute the washing.

### HOOVER BOSS 600MB

*Price:* $899

BEST BUY

TOP LOADER

A good all-round performer, with one of the fastest washing cycles, and its combined purchase and running costs are comparatively low, making it a Best Buy. However, it's not the gentlest on clothes.



PROFILES: RHONDA THWAITE

| Brand / model (in rank order) | PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%) | 2 Dirt removal score (%) | 3 Gentleness score (%) | 4 Spin efficiency score (%) | 5 Energy efficiency score (%) | 6 Water efficiency score (%) | 7 Water used (L) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ASKO** Quattro W640 (fr) **(A)** | 78 | 75 | 68 | 82 | 89 | 79 | 58 | 10 |
| **KLEENMAID BY BRANDT** TX 768A (t/dr) | 75 | 70 | 74 | 75 | 89 | 77 | 58 | 11 |
| **SIMPSON** Enviro 100 455100C (fr) | 74 | 72 | 70 | 73 | 83 | 72 | 77 | 8 |
| **BOSCH** WFB4001 (fr) | 73 | 69 | 70 | 75 | 89 | 69 | 77 | 11 |
| **AEG** Lavamat W830-W (fr) | 72 | 66 | 66 | 70 | 90 | 76 | 72 | 12 |
| **FISHER & PAYKEL** Intuitive Eco IW710 (tp) | 72 | 80 | 48 | 76 | 83 | 58 | 149 | 5 |
| **FISHER & PAYKEL** Intuitive Eco IW810 (tp) | 72 | 77 | 46 | 82 | 87 | 58 | 169 | 5 |
| **HOOVER** Boss 600MB (tp) | 68 | 78 | 44 | 65 | 74 | 60 | 120 | 5 |
| **FISHER & PAYKEL** Smart Drive Excellence GW709 (tp) | 67 | 74 | 50 | 79 | 63 | 55 | 169 | 4 |
| **HITACHI** SF-H800PX (tp) | 67 | 74 | 52 | 79 | 62 | 55 | 180 | 6 |
| **SIMPSON** Encore 605 365605K (tp) | 67 | 77 | 40 | 67 | 75 | 59 | 122 | 5 |
| **FISHER & PAYKEL** Smart Drive Pride MW059 (tp) | 66 | 70 | 52 | 72 | 74 | 55 | 123 | 4 |
| **LG** Turbo Drum WF-T902 (tp) | 66 | 70 | 56 | 67 | 70 | 60 | 180 | 6 |
| **SIMPSON** Enduro 801 225801K (tp) | 66 | 71 | 50 | 74 | 71 | 54 | 185 | 6 |
| **SIMPSON** Esprit 550 365550K (tp) | 66 | 76 | 46 | 64 | 70 | 57 | 117 | 5 |
| **FISHER & PAYKEL** Smart Drive Excellence GW609 (tp) | 65 | 69 | 52 | 79 | 63 | 54 | 149 | 4 |
| **PERFORMA BY MAYTAG** PAV3200AAW (tp) | 64 | 69 | 54 | 59 | 68 | 62 **(B)** | 153 | 4 |
| **WHIRLPOOL** 6LBR6245EQ1 (tp) | 64 | 72 | 54 | 57 | 63 | 59 | 123 | 4 |
| **HOOVER** Boss 750LB (tp) | 63 | 70 | 46 | 68 | 68 | 49 | 189 | 6 |
| **HOOVER** Boss 800RLA (tp) | 63 | 65 | 50 | 72 | 69 | 53 | 186 | 6 |
| **OMEGA** Air Injection 8000 (tp) | 63 | 79 | 52 | 41 | 68 | 45 | 191 | 8 |
| **SAMSUNG** Triflow SW65ASP (tp) | 63 | 73 | 54 | 58 | 62 | 53 | 153 | 5 |

PETR VALOUCH

## Observations during testing

- Two machines had problems with the load going out of balance so badly that we had to redistribute the clothes manually. The **SIMPSON Encore 605 365605K** (left) had this problem with every load we did, while the **FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW710** did it only occasionally.
- The energy label on the **AEG Lavamat W830-W** says the machine has a capacity of 6 kg. However, in the operating manual the claimed capacity is 5 kg. The machine's distributors explained (sort of) that it has a 5 kg capacity rating in Germany, a 5.5 kg capacity rating in the rest of Europe, and a 6 kg capacity rating in Australia. All performance tests were done at the Australian claimed capacity of 6 kg.

| | FEATURES | | | | | | | | | SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 Running costs ($ / 10 years)* | 11 Cold only tap connectors | Heater | Delay start (hours) | Out-of-balance adjustment | 11 Anti-crease | Variable spin | Load size sensor | Extra rinse | 11 Water saving option(s) | Claimed capacity (kg) | Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)** | Warranty (years) | Origin | Manufacturer / distributor | Price ($)*** |
| 435 | | ✓ | 1 to 12 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | 5.5 | 86 x 60 x 61 | 2 | Sweden | Asko | 1949 |
| 422 | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | 5.0 | 90 x 40 x 60 | 5 | France | Brandt / Kleenmaid | 1999 |
| 626 | Y or cap | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | 5.5 | 85 x 60 x 61 | 2 | Slovenia | Electrolux | 899 |
| 489 | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ **(D)** | ✓ | | | | 5.0 | 85 x 60 x 59 | 2 | China | Bosch | 1399 |
| 486 | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ **(E)** | ✓ | | | | 6.0 | 85 x 69 x 61 | 3 | Germany | Andi Co | 1449 |
| 983 | Cap | | 1 to 18 | ✓ | ✓ **(D)** | ✓ | ✓ | **(H)** | ✓ | 7.0 | 101 x 60 x 63 | 2 | Australia | Fisher & Paykel | 1222 |
| 1021 | Cap | | 1 to 18 | ✓ | ✓ **(D)** | ✓ | ✓ | **(H)** | ✓ | 8.0 | 101 x 65 x 68 | 2 | NZ | Fisher & Paykel | 1356 |
| 1002 | Cap | | | | ✓ **(D)** | | | | | 6.0 | 100 x 58 x 64 | 2 **(L)** | Australia | Electrolux | 899 |
| 1648 | Cap | | 1,3,9 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | **(J)** | ✓ | 7.5 | 100 x 65 x 68 | 2 | NZ | Fisher & Paykel | 1118 |
| 1779 | Cap **(C)** | | 3 to 12 | ✓ | ✓ **(E)** | **(F)** | ✓ | | | 8.0 | 95 x 63 x 68 | 2 | Japan | Hitachi | 1349 |
| 997 | Cap | | | | ✓ **(D)** | ✓ | | ✓ | | 6.0 | 100 x 58 x 64 | 2 **(L)** | Australia | Electrolux | 899 |
| 987 | Cap | | | ✓ | ✓ **(D)** | ✓ | | **(J)** | | 5.5 | 101 x 58 x 63 | 2 | Australia | Fisher & Paykel | 780 |
| 1655 | | | 3 to 48 | ✓ | ✓ **(E)** | **(F)** | **(G)** | ✓ | | 9.0 | 105 x 63 x 69 | 2 **(L)** | Korea | LG | 1379 |
| 1529 | Cap | | | | ✓ **(D)** | | | | | 8.0 | 108 x 68 x 72 | 2 **(L)** | Australia | Electrolux | 999 |
| 1023 | Cap | | | | ✓ **(D)** | | | | | 5.5 | 101 x 58 x 63 | 2 **(L)** | Australia | Electrolux | 599 |
| 1427 | Cap | | 1,3,9 | ✓ | ✓ **(D)** | ✓ | ✓ | **(J)** | | 6.5 | 100 x 60 x 63 | 2 | Australia | Fisher & Paykel | 1007 |
| 1508 | Cap | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | 8.0 | 111 x 69 x 77 | 2 **(L)** | US | Maytag | 1249 |
| 1262 | Y | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | 6.0 | 101 x 61 x 67 | 2 | US | Whirlpool | 849 |
| 1569 | Cap | | | ✓ | ✓ **(D)** | | | | ✓ **(K)** | 7.5 | 104 x 68 x 72 | 2 **(L)** | Australia | Electrolux | 899 |
| 1606 | Cap | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | 8.0 | 105 x 68 x 72 | 2 **(L)** | Australia | Electrolux | 999 |
| 1505 | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | **(G)** | | | 7.0 | 103 x 61 x 69 | 2 | Korea | Daewoo / Omega | 1100 |
| 1498 | Cap | | 3 to 18 | | ✓ **(D)** | **(F)** | ✓ | ✓ | | 6.5 | 101 x 69 x 71 | 1 | Korea | Samsung | 749 |

* *Includes standby costs (energy used when switched on at the power point but not in use).*

** *Dimensions are measured for the smallest box that could be placed around the machine, allowing for inlet and drain hoses. It's best to leave extra space around the machine for easy installation and air circulation.*

*** *Prices are recommended retail, as supplied by the manufacturers in September 2001. You can probably get a better price by shopping around.*

(tp) *Top loader.*

(fr) *Front loader.*

(t/dr) *Top-loading drum type.*

(A) *This model has been discontinued, but you should still be able to find it in stores for a while.*

(B) *Water drains at over twice the rate of most machines, so it may not be suitable if you have small or partially blocked drains.*

(C) *Supplied.*

(D) *Drip-dry option; see* Features, *right.*

(E) *Rinse hold option; see* Features, *right.*

(F) *You can't change the spin speed, only the spin time.*

(G) *Only for the normal 'fuzzy' program; other programs have a preprogrammed default.*

(H) *Has allergy cycle for extra rinse.*

(J) *Option of spray and deep, deep only, or two deep rinses.*

(K) *Manual suds/rinse water save only. Doesn't have the option of using less water when rinsing.*

(L) *Plus some extra cover for some parts and labour, detailed in the warranty documents.*

### Similar models

The **BOSCH WFB3200AU** is similar to the **WFB4001** on test, but has a higher spin speed option.

### 1 Overall score

Dirt removal contributes 40% to the overall score, with gentleness and spin, energy and water efficiency each weighted equally at 15%.

### 2 Dirt removal score

We measured how much light was reflected from specially soiled swatches before and after washing in a warm-water wash, taking into account the evenness of each wash.

### 3 to 9

See the notes with the table in the March 2001 article for information on what was tested and measured to achieve these scores and figures.

### 10 Running costs

This is an estimate of how much it'll cost you over 10 years for water and electricity if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a 'normal' warm wash. The calculations are based on 12.5 cents per kWh for electricity and $1 per 1000 L for water.

### 11 Features

See the March 2001 issue for explanations of features or functions other than those given here:

**Cold only tap connection required**

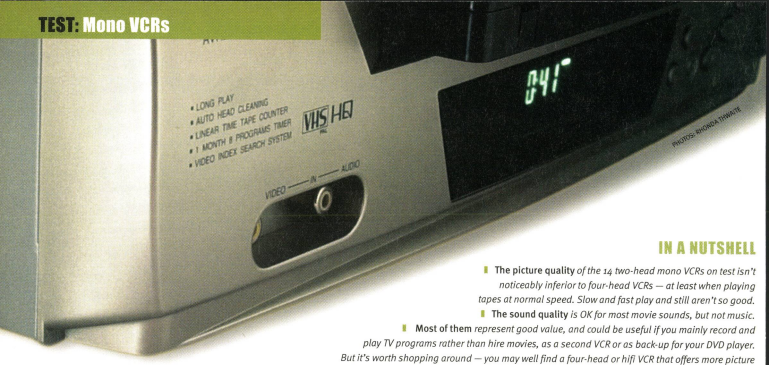
If you want to use only cold water, you may need a special Y-shaped connector or a sealing cap for the hot-water inlet. Unless stated otherwise, you'll have to buy it as an extra.

**Anti-crease feature**

Models with this feature have a permanent press or creasables cycle designed for easily creased fabrics. Some models offer additional means to help reduce creasing: the machine won't drain the last rinse water (**E**) or won't spin after water has drained (**D**).

**Water saving option(s)**

These machines have the option of using less water when rinsing, and manually saving suds and rinse water for reuse.




## IN A NUTSHELL

- **The picture quality** *of the 14 two-head mono VCRs on test isn't noticeably inferior to four-head VCRs — at least when playing tapes at normal speed. Slow and fast play and still aren't so good.*
- **The sound quality** *is OK for most movie sounds, but not music.*
- **Most of them** *represent good value, and could be useful if you mainly record and play TV programs rather than hire movies, as a second VCR or as back-up for your DVD player. But it's worth shopping around — you may well find a four-head or hifi VCR that offers more picture versatility and better sound than a two-head mono for close to the same price.*

# Basic VCRs

These basic video players offer few frills but most of the thrills — including a pretty decent picture.

In this age of DVD, HDTV, MPEG, DTS and other acronymic high-tech home entertainment thingies, there is — believe it or not — still a market for the humble two-head mono VCR (video cassette recorder, for those of us stumbling blindly in today's acronym-mad world, or AMW as they like to call it…).

As they're often (but not always) cheaper than four or six-head VCRs, you may choose to get one for the kids' room or your holiday house. Or, like many people are doing, you might use it to supplement your DVD player so that you can still record TV programs. All the basic VCR features are there — perhaps more than you'd expect — and the picture quality isn't noticeably inferior to the more evolved VCRs.

But what exactly do you get at this end of the market? We tested 14 to find out.

### WHAT TO BUY

| | |
|---|---|
| AKAI AVR200 | $229 |
| SAMSUNG SV-240B | $199 |
| SHARP VC-A300 | $249 |
| SONY SLV-EZ111 | $279 |
| RCA VRA 915AZ | $229 |

## NO SLO-MO

All the VCRs on test had good picture quality for standard-play (SP) recordings, with no major difference among them. Long-play (LP) recordings on the machines that can do it (all except the **SAMSUNG**) were also good. The **PANASONIC** and **SHARP** have extended play (EP), which triples the tape capacity and still gives a perfectly watchable result.

However, we weren't happy with the picture quality of most machines when we put them on still, slow play or a speed faster than normal play. Large parts of the screen showed only streaks, so you can't watch a scene in slow motion, for example. The exception was the **SAMSUNG**, which performed well in this test.

Ironically, the LP recordings — which you'd expect to be of lower quality than SP — were better in still or slow mode, and the EP recordings (where available) were better again.

## FACING THE MUSIC

They all scored well for general movie sound on SP, with no major differences among them. However, any recorded music (including film soundtracks) doesn't compare with the quality you'd get from a CD or DVD. Music recorded using LP or EP is even worse in quality.

## FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

Of the models in the *What to buy* list, the **AKAI** has a good remote, front panel controls and onscreen display. The **SHARP** is also worth considering.

# Profiles

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order from left to right. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in late 2001. It's worth shopping around, as they may be available at a cheaper price.

## AKAI AVR200*

*Price: $229*

GOOD POINTS

- Remote control is easy to use.
- Timer recording is easy to program.
- Front panel status indicator is clear and has all the important information.

BAD POINTS

- No automatic SP to LP.

* *This model has been discontinued, but you may still find it in shops.*

## SONY SLV-EZ111

*Price: $279*

GOOD POINTS

- Remote control is easy to use.
- Timer recording is easy to program.
- Front panel controls are easy to use.
- Has a good front panel status indicator.

BAD POINTS

- No automatic SP to LP.

## SAMSUNG SV-240B

*Price: $199*

GOOD POINTS

- Timer recording is easy to program.
- Front panel controls are easy to use.
- Good picture quality for normal play, and also on slow, still and fast view forward and reverse.
- Fast rewind.
- Child-resistant tape door: you need to push both ends of the door — as you would when putting a video tape in — making it difficult to insert foreign objects like small toys and toast.

BAD POINTS

- No long-play mode.
- May not be suitable for an older TV without AV sockets: to tune the VCR to the TV, you'll need to use the RF output adjustment function, which uses the onscreen display. But because you can't see the onscreen menu until the VCR's output has been adjusted to match the TV, it's a catch-22 situation, making this feature almost impossible to use.
- Status indicators on the front panel consist of a few tiny pilot lights rather than a digital display.

## SHARP VC-A300

*Price: $249*

GOOD POINTS

- Front panel controls are easy to use.
- Has extended play, which triples the tape capacity.
- Fast rewind.

BAD POINTS

- No *eject* key on the remote control. (Why would you want one, given that you still have to get up to take the tape out? To remind you to do it, rather than leaving it in the VCR till the next time you use it.)

## RCA VRA 915AZ

*Price: $229*

GOOD POINTS

- Timer recording is easy to program.
- Can be programmed using G-code.
- Easy to use front panel controls.
- Fast rewind.

BAD POINTS

- May not be suitable for an older TV without AV sockets (see the explanation given for the **SAMSUNG**).

# What about the rest?

The rest of the videos have good picture quality and scored only marginally lower overall than the ones we've recommended. So you'd probably be happy with any of them, especially if you found them at a good price.

A possible exception is the **PHILIPS**, which has very small buttons with small labels on the remote control — difficult to use and read. And like the **SAMSUNG** it has only small pilot lights on the front panel to indicate the machine's status — the rest have digital displays.

Of the other VCRs:

- The **HITACHI** and **PANASONIC** don't allow you to alter just a few settings of a timer recording after they've been stored.
- Manual tuning is relatively difficult on the **LG**, **NEC** and **SANYO** machines because they tune in fixed steps of pre-programmed frequencies rather than scanning the spectrum. You may have to press the key several times to find the right frequency. These models also accept invalid program dates, such as February 30 or April 31.
- Like the **SAMSUNG** and **RCA** (see *Profiles*, above), the **PALSONIC** and **TEAC** may not be suitable for older TVs without AV sockets.
- The **PANASONIC** scored worst overall for standby energy. However, it's possible to select a lower-power standby mode that would bring its energy score onto a par with the **JVC**, **PALSONIC** and **PHILIPS**, and increase its overall score by 1%. If the low-power standby option is chosen, the clock display is off when you switch off with the remote or the machine's standing by to record.

| Brand / model (in rank order) | PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%) | 2 Ease of use score (%) | 3 Picture quality score (%) | 4 Standby energy score (%) | Time to rewind 180-minute tape (min:sec) | 5 FEATURES Independent front AV inputs | Channel relocate | SP and LP | Automatic SP to LP | Slow play | Fran fran |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **AKAI** AVR200 **(A)** | 74 | 81 | 68 | 60 | 1:40 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | fwd |
| **SAMSUNG** SV-240B | 73 | 71 | 78 | 60 | 1:05 | | ✓ | SP only | | ✓ | fwd |
| **SHARP** VC-A300 | 72 | 76 | 67 | 70 | 0:59 | | | ✓ **(B)** | ✓ | ✓ | fwd |
| **SONY** SLV-EZ111 | 72 | 78 | 68 | 60 | 1:54 | | | ✓ | | ✓ | fwd |
| **RCA** VRA 915AZ | 71 | 76 | 68 | 60 | 1:05 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | fwd |
| **JVC** HR-J275EA | 69 | 73 | 68 | 50 | 2:50 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | fwd |
| **NEC** VN-207 | 69 | 69 | 68 | 70 | 1:18 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| **TEAC** MV-3094 | 69 | 69 | 70 | 60 | 1:41 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | fwd |
| **PALSONIC** VCR 2120A | 68 | 69 | 70 | 50 | 1:40 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | fwd |
| **SANYO** VHR-VK210A | 68 | 68 | 68 | 70 | 2:57 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| **HITACHI** MX818E | 67 | 65 | 68 | 70 | 2:19 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| **LG** CC290TW | 67 | 66 | 68 | 70 | 1:16 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| **PANASONIC** NV-SJ200 **(A)** | 66 | 70 | 68 | 40 | 1:03 | | | ✓ **(B)** | ✓ | ✓ | |
| **PHILIPS** VR107 | 62 | 60 | 68 | 50 | 2:54 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | fwd |

## What to look for

VCRs have a lot of features, some of them essential, some you'd probably never use. At this end of the market, you're probably more interested in the most frequently used features, which is what we've focused on here. A blue square means all the models tested have the feature, a green square that only some do — see the table for which ones.

- **One-touch recording** (OTR): For immediate recording you press the OTR key to start recording and set the duration.
- **Timer recording:** To record a future program, you have to set the date, start and end time and channel. All models also have a 'periodic' option that lets you set the timer to record your favourite daily or weekly program.
- **Manual and auto tuning:** With auto tuning the VCR finds the channels and allocates numbers to them. With manual tuning you can find the best reception in your area and allocate a number to a particular channel.
- **NTSC** is the TV picture format used in the US — Australia uses PAL. With all the VCRs tested you can play videos from the US if your TV is also compatible.
- **Automatically switches on** if a tape is loaded when in standby mode.
- **Automatically plays** on loading if the tape's protection tab is removed.
- **Automatically rewinds** at the end of the tape.
- **Automatic and manual tracking** so you can adjust the VCR to reduce streak lines and jitter.
- **Counter** can be reset to zero.
- **Fast view forward and backward** during play.
- **AV (audio/video) input and output sockets.**
- **Front AV inputs** that are independent of the ones at the back make it very easy to connect another VCR or video camera.
- **Channel erase or skip** lets you bypass or remove unassigned, unwanted or less frequently used channels.
- **Channel relocate** lets you change pre-assigned channels.
- **SP, LP** and **automatic SP to LP.** Short, or standard, play (SP) is the normal speed of the video recorder. Long play (LP) records at half the normal speed, fitting more on the tape. Some models can automatically switch to LP if they detect that there isn't enough tape left for your recording. The **PANASONIC** and **SHARP** have **extended play** (EP), which triples the capacity of the tape.
- **Slow playback.** You can run the video at a speed slower than normal, but sound is muted.
- **Frame by frame** allows you to advance or reverse the picture one frame at a time.
- **Still play** freezes the picture on the screen. (This function is called 'pause' on some players.)
- **G-code recording:** Television programs have a G-code number that represents their channel number, start time, date and duration, and is published in TV guides. This is an easy and convenient function: you just press the G-code button on the remote and type in the G-code number.
- **Child lock** will lock the front panel controls. You can only reactivate them with the remote control.
- **Eject key on remote control.** On most VCRs tested (all except the **JVC** and **SHARP**) you can eject the tape with the remote. The **PANASONIC** doesn't have a separate 'eject' button on the remote control, but if you hold down the stop button for three seconds, the tape will eject (the instructions don't tell you this).

| le ding | Child lock | Eject key on remote | SPECIFICATIONS Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)* | Origin | Warranty (years) | Manufacturer / distributor | Price ($)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | ✓ | 10 x 38 x 29 | Thailand | 1 | Prima | 229 |
| | | ✓ | 10 x 36 x 25 | Indonesia | 1 | Samsung | 199 |
| | ✓ | | 10 x 37 x 26 | Malaysia | 1 | Sharp | 249 |
| | | ✓ | 10 x 43 x 32 | Malaysia | 1 **(D)** | Sony | 279 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | 10 x 37 x 25 | Indonesia | Not stated | Thomson | 229 |
| | | | 10 x 37 x 29 | Malaysia | 1 | Hagemeyer | 249 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | 10 x 37 x 28 | Indonesia | 1 | NEC | 239 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | 10 x 37 x 29 | Korea | 1 **(E)** | Teac | 219 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | 10 x 36 x 28 | Korea | 1 | Palsonic | 209 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | 10 x 37 x 28 | Indonesia | 1 | Sanyo | 199 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | 10 x 39 x 30 | Malaysia | 1 | Hitachi | 249 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | 10 x 37 x 28 | Indonesia | 1 **(F)** | LG | 199 |
| | ✓ | ✓ **(C)** | 9 x 44 x 30 | Malaysia | 1 **(G)** | Panasonic | 284 |
| | ✓ | ✓ | 10 x 37 x 27 | Malaysia | 1 **(H)** | Philips | 219 |

* *Rounded up to the next centimetre, all protruding parts except cord included.*

** *Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in late 2001.*

**(A)** *This model has been discontinued, but you may still find it in shops.*

**(B)** *Has extended play (EP) too.*

**(C)** *Press and hold 'stop' key for three seconds.*

**(D)** *Extra two years for $83.*

**(E)** *Extra two years free if you register and up to a further seven years for $29 per year.*

**(F)** *Extra two years on drum and heads parts.*

**(G)** *Extra two years for $60 or four years for $90.*

**(H)** *Extra two years for $130, three years for $160 or four years for $170.*

### Notes to the table

All the VCRs tested have two video heads. All passed basic electrical safety tests and complied with standard tuning requirements.

### 1 Overall score

The scores were weighted as follows:

- Ease of use: 50%.
- Picture quality: 40%.
- Standby energy: 10%.

Ease of use is weighted highest because, for many people, it's this that limits a VCR's usefulness — and there wasn't a big difference among them for picture quality.

We didn't include a score for sound in the overall scores because there was no difference among the models on test and in any case you wouldn't buy a mono VCR for its sound performance.

### 2 Ease of use score

Many people find VCRs quite complex to use. We assessed the following areas for ease of use:

- Programming — with timer and G-code (if applicable): 30%.
- Remote control: 30%.
- Onscreen display: 15%.
- Front panel controls: 10%.
- Front panel display: 10%.
- Manual tuning: 5%.

### 3 Picture quality score

We assessed the VCRs on:

- Short-play (SP) recordings from various sources: 75%.
- SP recording played back in still, fast view forward (cue) and fast view backwards (review) modes: 25%.

### 4 Standby energy score

We measured the energy consumption in standby mode (when the VCR is on but not playing or recording videos). The higher the score, the lower the energy consumption in normal standby mode.

### 5 Features

See *What to look for*, left, for an explanation of these (and other) features.

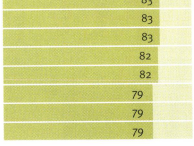
## HOW RELIABLE HAVE SUBSCRIBERS FOUND THEM?

We asked a group of subscribers about the reliability of their VCRs (mono and hifi), purchased in the last eight years. The graphs below show the results for the brands for which we got sufficient answers (the number in brackets tells you how many readers reported on the brand). We didn't have enough responses to report on some brands, including **RCA, PALSONIC** and **ORION** (see below), which were included in this test. There's very little difference in reliability between brands.

About 17% of respondents said their VCR had needed repair in the previous 12 months, making VCRs one of the most commonly repaired home appliances. The most common problem was dirty heads (12%).

### Percentage not needing repair

Differences of more than 5% are meaningful.




## Video on the move

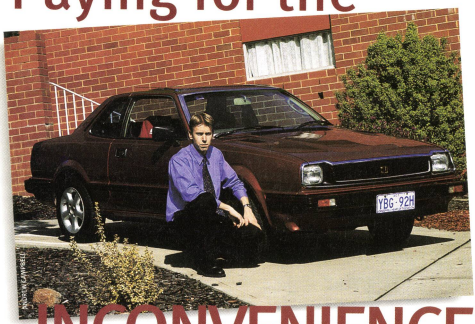
*Price: $229.*

The **ORION VPDC** is a little different from the other two-head videos we tested, not least because it can be used in a boat or caravan with a 12 volt DC adaptor. The main difference is that it doesn't have a TV tuner. You can still record a TV program if you connect its AV input to the TV's AV output (assuming it has one). However, the TV has to be on when you're recording and you can't watch one program and record another, which rather defeats the purpose unless you're recording for someone else. It can be used to record from a line input (such as a video camera or another VCR) and, of course, it can play videos.

Its picture score was good, better than most in this test, and the picture quality is good for slow, still and fast view forward and reverse play on SP — there's no LP or EP function.

It's easy to use: the remote control is simple and the keys are adequately sized, uncluttered and well-labelled. But like the **SAMSUNG** and **PHILIPS**, the front panel status indicator is a series of pilot lights, rather than a digital display.

# Paying for the INCONVENIENCE




PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW LEE

What are your rights when you call a mechanic to fix your car or an appliance?

What's worse than finding out your car has gearbox and clutch problems and you can't drive it any more without causing further damage? Getting a repairer to check it out, drive it (against your wishes) 'to death' and then being charged $100 for the privilege. That's what happened to Grant Rebikoff, of Higgins, ACT, when he sought help from a motor repair company that offered to service the car at his home.

The mechanic arrived on a Saturday morning and spent some time trying to start the car, phoning for spare part prices and diagnosing the problem — gearbox and clutch problems, as Grant had told him earlier. He then told Grant he'd take it for a test drive.

"At this point I *did not* want him to touch my vehicle any further due to his apparent lack of skill, but mainly because I'd been told by other specialists over the phone that driving the vehicle could cause further damage to the gearbox, clutch and related parts. I made this clear to the mechanic and instructed him that I *did not* want him to test drive my car," Grant says. But the mechanic insisted on it and assured him the car would be fine and would be returned to his car space at the top of his driveway.

About 30 minutes later, however, the mechanic reappeared on foot and without the vehicle. He offered to take his own car and drive Grant to his, which had broken down in the middle of a nearby road — it was stuck in gear and couldn't be pushed to the side. To get his car back in his driveway would cost him $50 for towing, Grant was told, and for the 'service', he owed the mechanic $100.

"At this point I was quite irate and annoyed. I had to pay $100 and for this money, I had my car started and was told what I was already aware of, and my car was in a worse condition than before and sitting in the middle of a street, unable to be moved."

Grant had the car towed away at his expense and fixed by another repairer for a fraction of the price the first company had quoted. He complained to this company about the poor service and has since received $200 compensation for damages incurred to his car, and an apology.

## YOUR RIGHTS WHEN GETTING THINGS FIXED

If you find yourself in a similar situation, there are a few things you can do to avoid the problem, or an escalation of it:

- Ask for a no-cost, obligation-free estimate or quote for the repair work. If time allows, get more than one and compare prices.
- If you can't take the car (or appliance) to a mechanic, negotiate with a mechanic or service personnel the maximum cost for them to visit and quote, and make sure you both agree what's included in the service.
- Make sure you know what you want and what you're prepared to pay, and ensure the service personnel know this. Insist that they make it equally clear to you what they'll do and what it'll cost.
- You're entitled to say what they can and can't do with your car or appliance at any time. If need be, give written instructions to protect yourself in case you're charged for work you didn't agree to.
- If the service personnel damage anything or incur unapproved expenses, you can hold them liable to compensate you.
- If problems arise, first discuss them directly with the management of the business you're dealing with.
- If you can't get a prompt and satisfactory outcome, send your complaint, and its required solution, in writing to the company or service provider. You may want to send copies to the fair trading agency in your state or territory, the Australian Consumers' Association (see page 2) and a relevant trade association (if the company is a member).
- If you still can't get an acceptable outcome to your complaint, you can lodge a claim through your state or territory's appropriate tribunal that covers consumer, trader or motor repair claims. In such a case, an independent witness could be useful to verify your claims. ■

# recalls&bans

*If you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know. Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after the recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.*

**THE PRODUCT: Tim the Toyman** has recalled the following three 'hangsell' toys (sold in packages that hang off a rack), sold through independent and convenience stores and newsagencies:

- **Action Cops Gun Set:** 2 x 12 cm black plastic pistols, 10 x 8 cm plastic darts with bright orange soft tips.
- **Commando:** 1 x 10 cm silver and black handgun, 1 x 10 cm commando figure, 2 x small black plastic rifles and assorted accessories.
- **Commando:** 1 x 10 cm silver and black handgun, 2 x 7.5 cm silver plastic darts with soft suction tips.

**The problem:** The toys don't meet the requirements of Australian Toy Standard 1647.2 — the projectiles pose an eye hazard to children.
**What to do:** Don't use the toys. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information, call Tim the Toyman on 1800 090 869.

**THE PRODUCT: Mitsubishi Motors Australia** has recalled **Mitsubishi NM Pajero vehicles**, manufactured from February 2000 to June 2001.
**The problem:** Power assistance may be reduced when you first start the engine after parking, requiring increased pedal effort for sudden braking.
**What to do:** Contact your authorised Mitsubishi dealer to have repairs made at no charge.

**THE PRODUCT: JDA Imports** has recalled **'Moda' fluid-filled drip flows** and **paperweights**, sold through Kleins stores from January to August 2001. The following model numbers are affected: 300142, 300122, 300405, 300537, 300395, 300180, 300235, 300029, 300222, 300143, 300031, 300621, 300622, 300623, 300624, 300468, 300404, 300466, 300467, 300237, 300120, 300177, 300141.
**The problem:** The products contain fluid that is harmful if swallowed, and which may combust at 81°C.
**What to do:** Keep it out of reach of children. Return it to a Kleins store for a refund, or to exchange it. For more information call 1800 818 908.

**THE PRODUCT: NF Importers** has recalled 2001 model **Ducati Monster 900ie, S4, SS900** and **SS750 motorbikes.**
**The problem:** The fuel lines located between the fuel tank and the pressure regulator could degrade, which could cause a fuel leak and/or a fire.
**What to do:** Contact your local Ducati dealer to have repairs made at no charge.

**THE PRODUCT: NF Importers** has recalled 2001 model **Ducati MHe 900 motorbikes.**
**The problem:** The gasket between the fuel tank and fuel pump flange could leak, which could cause a fire.
**What to do:** Contact your Ducati dealer to have repairs made at no charge.

**THE PRODUCT: Weston Milling** has recalled the following **Kitchen Collection 2 kg bread mixes** and **Kitchen Collection instant dry yeast** with use-by dates before June 18 02, sold in WA, SA, Queensland, NSW and Victoria:

- Kitchen Collection Wholemeal 2 kg Bread Mix.
- Kitchen Collection White 2 kg Bread Mix.
- Kitchen Collection Grain 2 kg Bread Mix.
- Kitchen Collection Soy and Linseed 2 kg Bread Mix.
- Kitchen Collection Instant Dry Yeast, 250 g.

**The problem:** It may contain metal contamination (pieces of electrical wiring).
**What to do:** Throw away the instant dry yeast sachets included with the bread mix or the 250 g Instant Dry Yeast packs and return the barcode to the following address: Kitchen Collection, Reply Paid 189, Chatswood DC 2067. Include your name and address and whether you'd prefer a refund or replacement packets of yeast. For more information phone 1800 645 515, from 8.30 am–5.30 pm (EST).

**THE PRODUCT: PB Foods** has recalled **Cadbury 2 L Teeny Freddo Vanilla ice cream, Cadbury 2 L Teeny Freddo Rainbow ice cream** and **Cadbury 1.5 L Teeny Freddo party cake** in WA and NSW. The affected products have best-before dates of 03/08/03 to 05/09/03.
**The problem:** The ice cream may contain pieces of plastic.
**What to do:** Don't eat it. Contact PB Foods' customer service operators on 1800 641 727, 8 am–5 pm (WST), to arrange for a refund.

**THE PRODUCT: Goodman Fielder Food Service** has recalled 500 g packs of **Allied Defiance Instant Dry Yeast**, packed between September 1, 1999, and September 3, 2001.
**The problem:** It may contain metal contamination (pieces of electrical wiring).
**What to do:** Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call 1800 025 066, Monday to Friday, 9 am–4.30 pm (EST).

**THE PRODUCT: Mauri Yeast Australia** has recalled 500 g packs of **Mauripan Instant Dry Yeast**, packed between September 1, 1999, and September 3, 2001, and sold in NSW, mainly through Campbells Cash & Carry stores.
**The problem:** It may contain metal contamination (pieces of electrical wiring).
**What to do:** Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call 1800 998 979, Monday to Friday, 8 am–5 pm (EST).

**THE PRODUCT: Yamaha Motor Australia** has recalled the following **Yamaha off-road competition vehicles** and **Yamaha on-road vehicles.**

- Off-road: 1996 to 2001 year models YZ125 and YZ250.
- On-road: 1997 and 1998 year models WR250; 2001 year model YZ250WR.

**The problem:** The throttle may stick.
**What to do:** Contact your Yamaha dealer to have repairs made at no charge.

**THE PRODUCT: JNH Australia** has recalled **Safety 1st Auto Sensor Night Lights**, sold in major retail outlets and independent stores.
**The problem:** The light may short-circuit during a power surge, possibly dislodging the plastic cover and exposing live wires while still plugged in — this would result in an electric shock hazard.
**What to do:** Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or contact JNH Australia at PO Box 4394, Mulgrave 3170. For more information phone the Quality Assurance Department on 1800 660 655.

**THE PRODUCT: Mazda Australia** has recalled **Tribute model vehicles** with the following VIN ranges: JMO CU081Y 11100009 to JMO CU081Y 11104986; JMO YU061Y 11100005 to JMO YU061Y 11104989; JMO YU06BY 11100006 to JMO YU06BY 11104995; JMO YU081Y 11100008 to JMO YU081Y 11104999.
**The problem:** The fuel tank may leak, which could cause a fire.
**What to do:** Contact your local Mazda dealer for repairs at no charge.

**THE PRODUCT: BMW Australia** has recalled **BMW R1150 GS model motorbikes** with VIN ranges from ZE00001 to ZE25358.
**The problem:** The speedometer cable shaft may come into contact with the brake pipe, which could result in the brake pipe chafing through.
**What to do:** Return the motorbike to any authorised BMW dealer for checking and rectification to be performed at no charge. For more information call the BMW Access Centre on 1800 813 299.

**THE PRODUCT: Oriental Merchant** has recalled **Nissin Instant Beef Noodles** (all use-by dates) sold in 100 g pillow packs, mainly through larger supermarkets and Asian retailers.
**The problem:** The noodles contain beef imported from Japan and have been withdrawn from sale following directives from the Australia New Zealand Food Authority, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service and the Japanese government, under suspension of beef and beef products because of confirmation of a case of BSE in a Japanese dairy cow.
**What to do:** Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information go to www.anzfa.gov.au and click on 'Australia suspends imports of Japanese beef following confirmation of BSE case', under media releases.

**THE PRODUCT: Kawasaki Motors** has recalled **Kawasaki motorcycles — model ZR1200-A1,** imported from March 2001.
**The problem:** The turn signal lamps may fail.
**What to do:** Contact your local Kawasaki dealer to have repairs made at no charge.

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# recalls&bans

*Continued from page 47*

**THE PRODUCT: Heinz Wattie's Australasia** has recalled the following 130 g cans: **Heinz Spaghetti in Tomato Sauce** (batch codes starting with 0791, 0571, 1121); **Heinz Spaghetti Bolognese** (batch codes starting with 0341, 1121); and **Heinz Spaghetti Oops** (batch codes starting with 0791, 1091, 1391, 1451), sold through major retail outlets to September 22, 2001. The batch codes are on the end of the cans.
**The problem:** A manufacturing fault has left pieces of rubber in a small number of cans.
**What to do:** Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

**THE PRODUCT: Oriental Merchant** has recalled **Tulip canned corned beef**
**The problem:** It contains beef imported from France and has been withdrawn from sale as requested by ANZFA, under the suspension of beef and beef products from specified European countries as a precautionary measure against mad cow disease (BSE).
**What to do:** Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information go to www.anzfa.gov.au and click on 'media releases', then on 'French corned beef slips into stores'.

**THE PRODUCT: Super Toyworld** has recalled certain **Super Toyworld bicycles** in the NT — a range of brands is affected (see *What to do*).
**The problem:** The bikes haven't been assembled correctly, and thus don't comply with the mandatory product safety standard for bicycles — they may be missing bells or warning devices, owner's manuals, reflectors and/or the end protectors of brake cables.
**What to do:** Phone Super Toyworld on (08) 8948 3600 to determine if your bike is affected. If it is, return it to a Super Toyworld store, which will fix it so that it meets the standard at no charge.

**THE PRODUCT: Compaq Computer Corporation** has recalled **AC adaptors** — model series numbers PPP003, PPP003SD and PP2012 (used with Armada M700, M300, E500, V300, 110, 1005 and 3500 notebooks). The model series number is on the top of the adaptor label underneath the Compaq Computer Corporation name.
**The problem:** The adaptor could overheat, posing a potential fire hazard.
**What to do:** Don't use it. Contact Compaq for a free replacement on 1800 252 277, or by registering on its website at www.compaq.com/products/notebooks/adapterrecall.

**THE PRODUCT: ANZFA** (Australia New Zealand Food Authority) has recalled the following brands of **soy sauce** — all pack sizes and best-before dates (except where the retailer informs you the supplier has provided them with clear evidence that the product was imported after the introduction of comprehensive import testing by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service on July 6, 2001):

- **Amoy Seafood soy sauce** (Hong Kong).
- **Gia Minh Seasoning soy sauce** (Vietnam).
- **Kimlan soy sauce** (Taiwan) — all written in Chinese.
- **Kimlan dark soy sauce** (Taiwan).
- **Knorr Seasoning** (Hong Kong).
- **President Creamy soy sauce** (Taiwan).
- **Silver Swan soy sauce** (Philippines).
- **Ta Tung soy bean sauce** (Taiwan).
- **Tau Vi Yeu Seasoning sauce soyabean** (Vietnam).
- **Tau Vi Yeu soyabean sauce** (Vietnam).
- **Zu Miao Fo Shan soy superior sauce** (China).
- **Zu Miao Mushroom soy sauce** (China).

**The problem:** Testing by ANZFA, the Queensland Department of Health and the New Zealand Ministry of Health showed unsafe concentrations of a chemical substance, chloropropanol 3-MCPD — a possible cancer-causing agent that poses a major health risk if consumed over a long period of time.
**What to do:** Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or discard the sauce. For more information go to www.anzfa.gov.au and click on 'media releases', then on 'Tests show more soy sauces are unsafe'.

**THE PRODUCT: Aussie Baby Products** has recalled **baby rocker/walkers** in NSW — model 1078H, featuring large 'Aussie Baby' stickers, and sold from July 1, 2001, to October 9, 2001.
**The problem:** It doesn't have an adequate braking system, and so doesn't meet requirements of the NSW Product Safety Regulations.
**What to do:** Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or for a walker that complies with NSW Fair Trading and US safety standards. For more information call Aussie Baby Products on (02) 9755 9508.

**THE PRODUCT: Kickers Kiddieswear & Toys** has recalled **baby walkers/rockers** in NSW — item numbers 1078H1, 1078H2 and 1077G, sold from August 2 to September 19, 2001.
**The problem:** It doesn't have an adequate braking system, and so doesn't meet requirements of the NSW Product Safety Regulations.
**What to do:** Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information contact Kickers Kiddieswear & Toys on (02) 9724 1735, or at 3/88 John Street, Cabramatta 2166.

**THE PRODUCT: Quattro's Bakehouse and Fine Foods** has recalled **1 kg Focaccia Bread & Roll Mixes** (all use-by dates on products sold prior to 2002) — in both **garlic** and **sun-dried tomato flavours**, sold nationally through Coles supermarkets, and through Woolworths supermarkets in Victoria, NSW and Queensland.
**The problem:** The yeast sachets in the bread and roll mixes may contain metal (galvanised wire).
**What to do:** Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call (03) 9357 7411.

**THE PRODUCT: Everything Here $2 store** has recalled **Zen candles** sold in its stores in NSW, Victoria and SA. The candle is a small (around 6 cm tall), clay flowerpot with Chinese symbols on the outside (white with black writing or red with black writing).
**The problem:** The candles have lead wicks, and if burned in an enclosed space over long periods can cause health problems.
**What to do:** Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information phone Trish Carter on (03) 9371 5510.

**THE PRODUCT: The Reject Shop** has recalled the following toys:

- **Space Launcher Disc Shooter** (product code 21767609): a coloured disc shooter, 10 x 8 cm, which shoots coloured, circular plastic discs with a 4 cm radius.
- **Space Defender UFO Disc Shooter** (product code 21729966): a coloured disc shooter, 10 x 8 cm, which shoots coloured, circular plastic discs with a 4 cm radius.
- **Aircraft Launcher with 3 planes** (product code 21694851): a coloured pistol launcher, 19 cm long, which fires coloured jets.
- **Swat Dart Gun with darts** (product code 21792991): a blue toy gun, 20 x 10 cm, with 10 cm long bright orange, soft plastic darts.

The toys were sold through the Reject Shop and Everything Here $2 stores in NSW, Victoria and SA.
**The problem:** The toys don't meet requirements of the Australian toy standard relating to the force used to dispense each projectile, and so could cause injury, perhaps to a child's eye. The dart gun can also be used with other unsuitable projectiles.
**What to do:** Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information contact Trish Carter on (03) 9371 5510.

**THE PRODUCT: Thanus Imports** has recalled **Weipro aquarium lights** in Queensland — model number LP-120. The lights are 1200 mm (4 feet) long with two 40 W fluorescent tubes, are made of aluminium, have two switches and two pin outlets on one end (the supply plug has only two pins with no earth pin), and were sold through Pet Smart Pet Supplies, Townsville.
**The problem:** The light fitting doesn't have a protective earth, creating an electric shock hazard — if the fitting becomes wet and corrodes and/or malfunctions, the outer metal case can become live at 240 V.
**What to do:** Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for rectification of the problem. For more information call Thanus Imports on (07) 3868 4101.

**THE PRODUCT: Cisco Systems Australia** has recalled **power adaptors**, sold from April 2000 to September 2001, and distributed with the following Cisco ADSL routers: 827, 827-4V, 826, SOHO77, SOHO770-50, 827-EUR.
**The problem:** The power adaptors could overheat and melt a hole through the housing, posing a fire hazard; the exposed wires also pose an electric shock hazard.
**What to do:** Don't use it. Contact Cisco Systems Australia to get a free replacement, or more information, on 1800 805 227 (or go to www.cisco.com).

**Weekly updates of recalls and bans are posted on www.choice.com.au. You can also email us any recalls or bans not on this list at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.**

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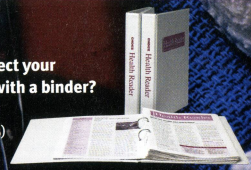


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# www.choice.com.au

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*To whet your interest, here are some picks from the current information available on www.choice.com.au.*

## HAPPY NEW YEAR

Is your new year's resolution to get your finances in order (again)? Use our online tools to help sort things out. These are some of the new ones.

## HOME AND CONTENTS INSURANCE SELECTOR

Simply type in a few basic details — do you want accidental damage or defined events, home building, home contents or both — and where you live, for a list of policies to suit your needs, ranked in CHOICE's recommended order. To find it, click on 'home and contents insurance' under 'Top Ten Reports' on the home page, log in, then click on 'home and contents insurance selector' on the right-hand sidebar link.

When you see the list, tick the boxes beside the policies you're interested in and click on 'show me the details' to find out what each one covers, including scores for things like depreciation, flood cover, fences, fire, theft, weather, burst pipes, glass breakage and more.

From here you can also click on links to take you straight to explanations of things like averaging clauses, or direct to the company websites (the phone numbers are also listed for each company if you'd prefer to give them a call).

By clicking on the sidebar links, you can also use our contents insurance worksheet, have a look at our insurance premium watch results, and/or read our guide to home and contents insurance.

## BORROWING TO INVEST?

If you're considering investing with some borrowed funds, our online tool can help work out how your gains or losses could be magnified. Click on 'money' on the home page, 'borrowing to invest' under 'tools', then on the right-hand sidebar link to the 'borrowing to invest' calculator.

Enter the amount you want to borrow, the amount of your own money you plan to invest, and then try out one or more percentages to get an idea of losses or gains you could expect if your investment fell or rose by that amount.

From the calculator, you can also click on the sidebar links to 'invest with other people's money', 'choosing a home equity loan', 'investor education: where to go', our money forum discussion, or you can read all our advice on margin loans.

## QUIZ: WANT TO BE YOUR OWN BOSS?

While most of us dream about being master of our own destinies, the reality is that self-employment doesn't suit everyone. Some people find it difficult to work independently, or the social aspect of working with others is too important to give up. Others don't like the uncertainty self-employment can entail, especially in the early days. Or they don't feel they're assertive or determined enough to set out on their own.

To help you assess whether it could be right for you, fill in our short questionnaire. It's by no means scientific and doesn't pretend to offer any great insights, but it may help you decide whether or not to take the plunge into the great unknown. Just click on 'money' under 'browse by category' on the home page, then on 'Quiz: Want to be your own boss?' and on the sidebar link.

The quiz is taken from Derryn Heilbuth's *Earning Money from Home* — click on the link at the bottom of the quiz for more on the book. You can also link to our checklist for buying a business, to information about franchises, to the rundown on why so many businesses go broke, and more.

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# index

**HOW TO USE THIS INDEX**

**Bold type** indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.
* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items or letters.
For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts, many other small pieces, and Recalls and Bans.


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digital **Jun**
web **Aug**
Camping
showers, solar **Apr**
tents, dome **Apr**
Carpets, oriental Jul
Cars
crash tests, ANCAP Jun, Oct
high-octane petrol Jan/Feb
immobilisers Nov
reliability **Sep**, Oct*
tyre and brake service chains **Oct**
CD players, personal **Jun**
Champagne and sparkling wine **Dec**
Child/baby concerns
baby monitors **Jul**
cots **Jan/Feb**
head lice treatments Aug, Jan/Feb*
highchairs **Aug**, Oct*
immunisation Oct
Cleaners, shower **Jan/Feb**
Coffee, instant **Oct**
Coffee machines **Apr**
Column heaters **May**
Coolers **Dec**
Cordless phones **Jan/Feb**
Cots **Jan/Feb**
Credit cards
loyalty schemes Oct
top 10 **Dec**

Depilatory creams **Mar**
Digital cameras **Jun**
Digital TV May
Dishwashers **May, Jul***
Drugs, generic Nov, Jan/Feb*
Ducted air conditioning Oct
DVD players **May, Dec**
DVDs, understanding Dec

Electric frypans **Aug**
Electric toothbrushes **Nov**
Electrolysis, hair removal Jun
Energy drinks Aug, Oct*
Epilators **Mar**
'Eskies' **Dec**
Espresso machines **Apr**, Aug*

Fax machines **Sep**, Nov*
Financial — see also Banks
investment seminars Aug
managed funds Jan/Feb
margin loans Oct
retire at 50 Apr, Sep*
Flower deliveries **Dec**
Flu shots **May**, Jul*
Food
alfalfa sprouts **Sep**
coffee, instant **Oct**
energy drinks Aug
ham, sliced and shredded **May**
honey Jun
irradiation Jan/Feb
meat labelling Nov
muffins **Jul**
mushrooms Oct
noodles, two-minute **Mar**
pâté **Jul**
safety, quiz Dec
salad Sep, Oct*
sauces, simmer Apr
spreads, dairy and margarine **Aug**
styling Jan/Feb
Food warming tray **Nov**
Freezers, small **Aug**
Fridges
385–420 L **Jun**
530–560 L **Nov**
Frypans, electric **Aug**

Garden
lawnmowers, petrol **Nov**
secateurs **Sep**, Nov*
Generic drugs Nov, Jan/Feb*

Hair removal **Mar**
electrolysis and laser Jun
Ham, sliced and shredded **May**
Hands-free kits for mobile phones **Apr**
Hangovers, dealing with Dec
Head lice treatments Aug, Jan/Feb*
Health
alternative therapies Sep
BSE/vCJD Mar
flu shots **May**, Jul*
generic drugs Nov, Jan/Feb*
immunisation, children Oct
insurance
update Jun, Aug*, Nov*
myths Jul, Oct*
water, how much should you drink? Oct
Heaters, column **May**
High-octane petrol Jan/Feb
Highchairs **Aug**, Oct*
Home entertainment
what you need May
DVD players **May**
Home/property inspections **Mar**
Home security
DIY alarms **May**, Nov*
makeover May
Honey Jun
House and contents insurance **Sep**, Nov*, Dec*

Immobilisers, car Nov
Immunisation, children Oct
Index, four-year Jun
Inkjet printer refills Jan/Feb
Insurance
health, update Jun, Aug*, Nov*
house and contents **Sep**, Nov*, Dec*
travel **Nov**
Investment seminars Aug
Irradiation, food Jan/Feb

Laser hair removal Jun
Laundry tablets **Jul**
Lawnmowers, petrol **Nov**
Light bulbs, incandescent **Oct**
Loyalty schemes, credit cards Oct

Mad cow disease Mar
Managed funds Jan/Feb
Margin loans Oct
Meat labelling Nov
Media, science reporting Mar
Microwave ovens, 30–35L **Jul**
Mobile phones
hands-free kits **Apr**
WAP technology Apr
Money — see Financial
Mops, steam **Apr**
Muffins **Jul**
Mushrooms Oct

Nail polish **Jul**
Noodles, two-minute **Mar**

Oriental carpets Jul, Oct*
Ovens, wall, electric
multifunction **Oct**

Paint, exterior **Dec**
Pâté **Jul**
Pest control devices, electronic May
Petrol, high-octane Jan/Feb
Phones
cordless **Jan/Feb**
mobile — see Mobile phones
plans, local and STD **Jul**
Prescription drugs, generic Nov
Printers **Aug**
Printers, inkjet refills Jan/Feb
Property/home inspections **Mar**

Refrigerators — see Fridges
Retire at 50 Apr, Sep*
Reuse and repair centres Sep
Rice cookers **Jun**

Salad Sep, Oct*
Sauces, simmer Apr
Scanners, flatbed **Oct**
Science in the media Mar
Secateurs **Sep**, Nov*
Security
DIY home alarms **May**, Nov*
home makeover May
Shampoo **Nov**
Shavers, men's **Mar**
Shower cleaners **Jan/Feb**
Shower gels **May**
Showers, solar camping **Apr**
Sparkling wine and champagne **Dec**
Spreads, dairy and margarine **Aug**
Steam mops **Apr**

Telephones — see Phones
Television
digital May
51 cm **Apr**
Tents, dome **Apr**
Toasters **Apr**
Toilet paper **Jul**
Toothbrushes, electric **Nov**
Toothpaste **Jun**
Travel insurance **Nov**
Tyre and brake service chains **Oct**

Vacuum cleaners **Aug**
VCRs, mono **Jan/Feb**
Video cameras, digital **Nov**, Jan/Feb*
Videotapes **Dec**

Wall ovens, electric
multifunction **Oct**
WAP technology Apr
Warming tray, food **Nov**
Washing machines **Mar, Sep, Jan/Feb**
Water, how much should you drink? Oct
Wax kits, hair removal **Mar**
Web cameras **Aug**
Webmail Oct
Wine, sparkling **Dec**



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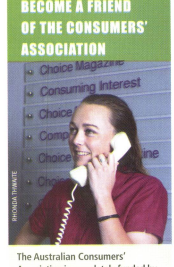


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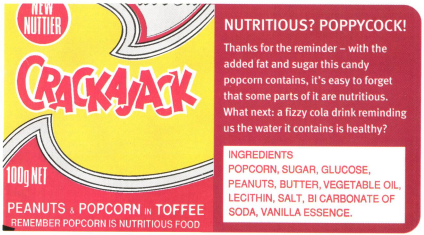
## Eau de chook pooh

Our reader, Ruth, cut this label off a bag of fertiliser — she couldn't send us the whole thing because, as she pointed out, it's "a bit on the nose". The fragrance is natural, all right — chicken manure being a natural substance — but she dreads to think what it would have been like before it was 'improved'!

**WE'RE CONFUSED: DO YOU PAY FOR IT OR NOT?**




### NUTRITIOUS? POPPYCOCK!

Thanks for the reminder – with the added fat and sugar this candy popcorn contains, it's easy to forget that some parts of it are nutritious. What next: a fizzy cola drink reminding us the water it contains is healthy?

INGREDIENTS
POPCORN, SUGAR, GLUCOSE, PEANUTS, BUTTER, VEGETABLE OIL, LECITHIN, SALT, BI CARBONATE OF SODA, VANILLA ESSENCE.

## Know any fruit that could use some cosmetic surgery?

What's the deal with using pears to advertise a liposuction service? Pears aren't exactly known for their fat content and, frankly, the plump, juicy-looking pear is the more enticing option.

The wrinkly tomato that's plumped out smooth is a little more convincing, even if you don't necessarily associate tomatoes with wrinkles. And at least the 'after' shot looks more appealing than the 'before'.

But what are we to make of the hairy apple, used to demonstrate the effectiveness of laser hair removal? Big and small pears exist in real life, as do smooth and wrinkly tomatoes. But an apple with a dodgy hairstyle? Then it comes out bald on top — surely not what most people want from laser hair removal?

If we were ad execs and were stuck with the fruit theme, we'd at least choose more appropriate fruit: avocados for liposuction, a prune/plum for de-wrinkling and a peach for laser hair removal. We've missed our true calling ...

### NUTRITION INFORMATION

| Details (approx.) | Per Portion | Per 100g |
|---|---|---|
| ENERGY | 1522 kJ | 1353 kJ |
| PROTEIN (N x 6.25) | 14.5 g | 12.9 g |
| FAT (naturally derived from flour) | 1.4 g | 1.3 g |
| CARBOHYDRATES - TOTAL | 74.3 g | 66.0 g |
| - SUGARS (naturally derived from flour) | 0.9 g | 0.8 g |
| CHOLESTEROL | 0 mg | 0 g |
| DIETARY FIBRE | 4.2 g | 3.7 mg |
| SODIUM | 302.9 mg | 270.0 g |
| POTASSIUM | 110.0 mg | 100.0 mg |

## Get out the tape measure for this one ...

This 500 gram packet of Lebanese bread contains five pieces of bread — so, 100 grams each. The nutrition information is provided per 100 grams — fair enough. But apparently the *portion size* is not 100 grams — it's slightly more than one piece of bread. In fact it seems to be about one and one-eighth pieces of bread — not impossible, but hardly an amount you're likely to eat!

## HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

*The Hard Word* would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to R Arends, A Quail, I Gross, M Thurley and the Lang family for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep sending them in.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.